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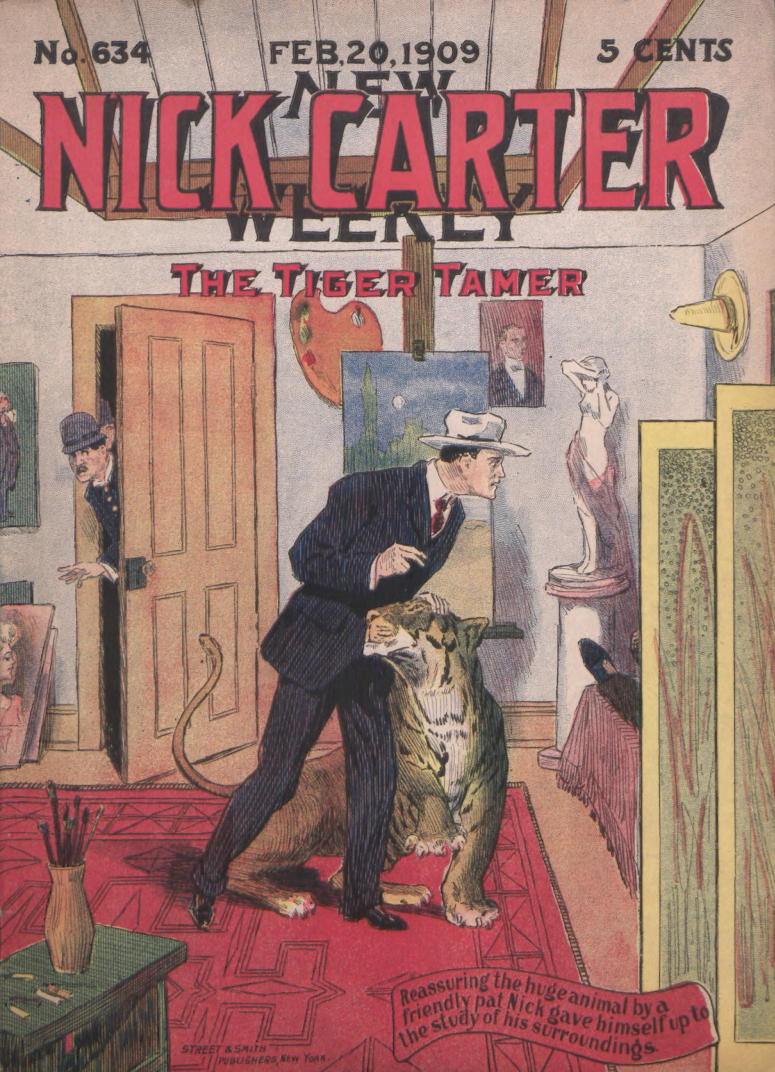
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE TIGER TAMER



Reassuring the huge animal by a friendly pat Nick gave himself up to the study of his surroundings.

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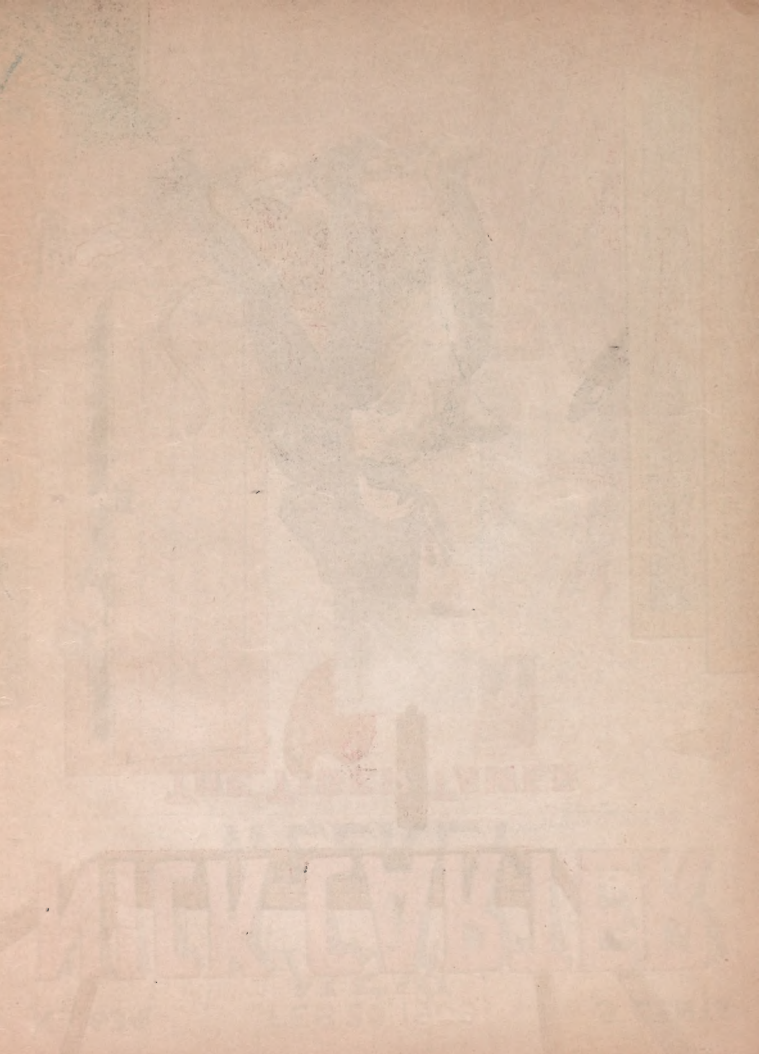

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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THE TIGER-TAMER;

OR,

Nick Carter's Boldest Strategy.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

MARVELOUS EXHIBITIONS OF SKILL.

It was Monday morning of the first week in June—the particular date does not matter—when Nick Carter, as he seated himself at the breakfast-table, opened and read the following brief letter.

There was upon his countenance the evidence of some surprise as he did so, and after having perused it a second time, he remarked impersonally to his two assistants who were at the table with him:

"Listen to this, lads," and then he read aloud as follows:

"'My Dear Mr. Carter: You will have noticed by the bill-boards scattered throughout the city that Adam Hindpaugh's circus and menagerie opens at the Garden to-morrow night, which will be the date of your receipt of this letter. You will also have seen my name announced among the list of performers, even if you have not happened to hear about me before this. The announcements proclaim me to be the greatest tiger-tamer in the world, and, without egotism, I think I may assure you that there is some reason for the claim.

"'I have for some time past been quite anxious to secure an interview with you, Mr. Carter, the subject of which I do not care to state in this letter, as it is upon an entirely personal and confidential matter which I would wish to go no further than a discussion between ourselves.

"'You will find enclosed herewith two tickets for the best seats at our disposal, and I would respectfully request that you attend the circus on the opening night, and that, after the performance is over and the audience has dispersed, you will go to the basement of the Garden, where the animals are exhibited, and ask to be directed to me. If you will do this, I will regard it as a great favor and will satisfactorily explain my reasons for the request at our interview.

"'When you attend the circus performance, I wish you would give particular attention to my own act with the tigers; and also I wish you would devote even more scrutinizing attention to the performance of Miss Millie Slade.

"'You will notice that Millie Slade is called the most wonderful bareback equestrienne that ever appeared before an audience, and that she gives a most remarkable exhibition of marksmanship with rifle and pistol while riding at full speed on the bare back of her horse around the sawdust ring.

"'With these few remarks and in the earnest hope that you will attend the performance, that you will

notice the things to which I have called your attention, and that you will not fail to look me up after the performance, I remain,

"'Most respectfully yours,

"'JAMES DUMONT,

"'The world's most wonderful and greatest tiger-tamer.'"

"It's a pity he didn't send us three tickets, instead of two," said Patsy, with a shrug of his shoulders and a grimace, but Chick laughingly responded:

"Two will be sufficient. You can go with the chief, Patsy; I have another engagement for to-night."

Nick Carter was reading the letter in silence for the third time, and paid no attention to these side remarks, but now he raised his eyes, and remarked, with a smile:

"It strikes me, lads, that this is rather an unusual communication. I don't know why the tiger-tamer should feel called upon to send me two tickets for the show, and to ask for an interview afterward; do you?"

"I think I could make a shrewd guess about it," replied Chick.

"Well, what is it?"

"My guess would be that the tiger-tamer has, or at least fancies that he has, some sort of a case on hand. He would like to submit it to you."

"But," said Nick, "if that is so, he knows my address; the receipt of this letter is proof of that."

"I would go further in my guessing," continued Chick.

"Well?"

"I would suggest that the two acts to which he has called your attention, his own and Millie Slade's, have something to do with the matter he has in mind."

"My guess wouldn't be at all like that," spoke up Patsy.

"What is yours?" asked Chick.

"The press-agent," was the retort.

"Eh! How do you make that out?"

"Oh, those fellows are always looking for some chance of an additional advertisement. The tiger-tamer, to judge from his letter, is not without egotism and conceit."

"That's quite apparent," replied Chick.

"You have only to look at the manner in which he signed the letter to assure you of that fact."

"Well, what is your guess about it?"

"Why, my guess is that the tiger-tamer and the world's most wonderful equestrienne have put their two heads together, and have said to each other: 'We'll induce Nick Carter to attend the circus on our opening night, and then we'll give it out to the press-agent that he was here as our guest.' That's the way I size it up."

Nick Carter, however, shook his head negatively.

"That's all in your eye, Patsy," he said. "The little bit of advertising that either of them could get out of the fact that I was at the circus as their guest wouldn't amount to anything."

"Well," asked Patsy, "shall we use the tickets?"

Nick Carter laughed aloud at that.

"You seem more than ready to be an invited guest, Patsy," he said.

"Well, you wouldn't attend an important matter like that without taking me with you, and I want you to understand right here and now, chief, that I like a circus just as well to-day as I did when I was a kid and used to crawl under the canvas and carry water to the elephants in order to get inside."

"All right, Patsy; we will go."

And so it happened that when the performance began at the Garden that night, Nick Carter and his second assistant, Patsy, occupied two of the best seats from which they could obtain the most advantageous view of the two acts that had been called to their attention.

We need make no particular reference to the other parts of that performance, for the two acts in question are the only ones which at present interest us.

The performance of the tiger-tamer was the first of the two to be presented, and it was, in fact, a remarkable exhibition of the subjection of wild beasts of the jungle to the will of a man. Jim Dumont was certainly master of his craft.

A stage was quickly erected in the middle of the center ring, and it was surrounded by a sectional cage of iron bars which was put in place with that wonderful celerity demanded of circus men. Twelve tigers, each in appearance a king of the jungle, were admitted to this temporary enclosure, and the audience was thrilled to a sudden hush by the dropping of James Dumont into their very midst from a trapeze directly above the center of the enclosure. The audience knew at that instant that there was no door of egress from the cage by which James Dumont could escape from his pets if he should have occasion to do so, save only the one by which they had been given admittance; and that had been locked and barred on the outside.

All the other performers had withdrawn; the activities in the two adjoining rings ceased for the time being, and the attention of every person in that im-

mense audience was centered upon the act of the tiger-tamer. His twelve savage animals were put through all sorts of marvelous performances. They jumped ropes, leaped through blazing hoops, marched around the inside of the enclosure erect, with their forepaws resting upon one another, and they did other equally surprising tricks, evidencing the wonderful control that the tiger-tamer had over them.

At words of command from their master they marched around their cage in single file, in double file, in columns of three and of four, and, without exception, they obeyed his slightest word of command in every instance.

And finally, as a climax to the exhibition, a tackle was let down from above, the huge iron cage was lifted bodily from its base, and the tigers followed their master from the platform to the sawdust ring, and thence passed from the sight of the intensely interested audience through the dressing-room doorway, following Dumont as so many well-trained dogs might have done. It had been a thrilling moment for the audience to endure while these twelve wild beasts were practically at liberty, and a sigh of relieved suspense was breathed by every person there when at last the tigers disappeared from view with their trainer.

One of the twelve animals had attracted particular attention as being not only the best performer of them all, but as representing the most beautiful specimen of his kind that ever had been presented to an admiring audience.

This particular animal was named Prince, and throughout the performance Prince's strong affection for his master had been noticed by every pair of eyes in the throng.

"That was a remarkable performance," said the detective to Patsy, when it was over.

"Yes," replied the second assistant, in a low tone; "but I saw nothing about it to suggest any idea for the writing of that letter, save only the one I advised at the breakfast-table this morning."

"Nor I," admitted the detective.

Other performers now appeared in the three rings, and the attention of the two detectives was drawn to them; but after a little the other acts to which their particular observation had been called was performed.

The world's most wonderful equestrienne and most marvelous snapshot with rifle and pistol made her appearance.

As before in the case of Dumont, she had the entire attention of the audience, the rings on either side of the center one being, for the time, vacant.

She dashed in upon the scene, riding a horse that wore no strap of any kind upon him; and he was not the stereotyped circus horse, either.

He was a small, sleek, chestnut-coated Arabian, lithe of limb and as graceful in his motions as one of Jim Dumont's tigers.

With his beautiful rider standing erect upon his back, he dashed into the center ring, circled it several times, leaped the barriers to one and then to the other of the end rings, circling them each in its turn; and then, still on a wild run from ring to ring, and circling each of them, loaded pistols and rifles were thrown in turn into the grasp of Millie Slade. Targets in the shape of glass balls were tossed into the air by supernumeraries, and while the horse was dashing at his mad pace from ring to ring and around them, she discharged these firearms with such wonderful accuracy that not a glass ball escaped her aim. Each one she shattered to fragments before it could fall to the ground, and the interior of that immense building rang with the thunder of applause induced by her marvelous two-fold exhibition of skill.

CHAPTER II.

THE TIGER-TAMER'S PET.

At the close of the performance Nick Carter and Patsy retained their seats until the greater part of the audience had passed from the building; then they rose, and made their way slowly toward the basement, which was the menagerie part of the show, and where they had been bidden to search for the tiger-tamer.

He met them directly in front of the cages where his pets were confined, having resumed his street-dress and outwardly bearing the appearance of a gentleman of refinement, and the very last one whom, in passing upon the street, you would select as a professional tiger-tamer.

He was standing there, idly scanning the faces of strangers as they approached, and the glance bestowed upon Nick Carter as the detectives advanced toward him was one of utter unrecognition; a fact which informed the detective that Jim Dumont was unacquainted with his personal appearance.

Nick stepped forward and touched him upon the arm.

"Good evening, Mr. Dumont," he said. "I have to thank you for the very pleasant entertainment you have afforded me and my second assistant this eve-

ning. This is Mr. Garvan, Mr. Dumont, and I am Nick Carter, your guest."

The cordial grasp with which the tiger-tamer seized upon the detective's extended hand betrayed his pleasure at the meeting; but he made no allusion to his letter at that moment, saying, instead:

"I am glad that you liked the performance, Mr. Carter; and you, also, Mr. Garvan. What do you think of my twelve beauties, eh?"

"They are superb," said the detective; "particularly the one you called Prince."

"Ah! Prince; yes, indeed. Prince is almost human in his intelligence. You would never believe that a huge cat like Prince could know as much as he does. Step this way, if you please, and I will show him to you again."

The tiger-tamer led them a short distance, to a cage that was separated from the others by a somewhat greater distance than that generally used, and behind the bars of which the sleekest, largest, and most beautiful tiger that Nick Carter had ever seen was pacing up and down, purring comfortably as he walked, and keeping his eyes fixed upon his master with an expression of almost docile affection.

Dumont stepped up close to the bars and thrust both arms inside them, drew the tiger's head toward him, scratching the animal's ears and patting him affectionately, speaking in an unknown tongue to him as he did so, and thus calling forth every expression of affection which it is possible for a dumb animal to give.

"Prince is my chum," he said, withdrawing his arms from the cage and turning again to face the detective. "He is my own particular property; the other tigers belong to the menagerie, Prince belongs to me."

"Have you had him in your possession long?" asked the detective, stepping a little closer to the cage.

"All his life," replied Dumont. "I have nursed him and tended him since he was born. His mother died in giving him birth, and I raised him on a bottle. Perhaps you can't understand it, Mr. Carter, but I am just as fond of Prince as if he were human, and Prince is just as fond of me as I am of him."

"He certainly is a beautiful animal," said the detective, stepping still closer, and Dumont smilingly replied:

"Put your hands inside the bars, Mr. Carter, and scratch his ears and pat him as I did just now. I can see that he likes you. Don't be afraid of him."

Without an instant's hesitation, the detective followed the suggestion, and the tiger accepted his advances exactly in the spirit that Dumont had indicated.

"Shall I try it, too?" said Patsy, stepping forward; but Dumont shook his head, and replied:

"Not just now, Mr. Garvan. It isn't well to force too many acquaintances upon Prince at once; but he likes you—I can see that."

"You had some particular reason for requesting my attendance here to-night, did you not?" asked the detective, still leaning against the bars and caressing the tiger with his right hand.

"Yes, Mr. Carter, I did; but, with your permission, I will defer our discussion of it until we get to my rooms. You don't mind, do you? You and Mr. Garvan have half an hour to spare to go there with me, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Nick. "I have no objection."

"I suppose you took particular notice of the other act to which I called your attention?" asked Dumont.

"Yes, I was almost as greatly interested in Miss Slade's performance as in yours. Am I also to make her acquaintance this evening?"

The tiger-tamer smiled enigmatically, hesitated a moment, and replied:

"Why, yes; come with me, if you will."

He stepped aside long enough to give a few directions to one of the animal-tenders, in which Nick Carter heard him say that he would return presently, and then led the way rapidly to another part of the building, where, after tapping against the door, he was bidden to enter.

In another moment Nick Carter and Patsy Garvan were acknowledging the tiger-tamer's introduction to Millie Slade, who received them graciously; but, nevertheless, with an air of restraint about her, Nick Carter thought, for which he did not at the moment attempt to find any explanation.

Nick and Patsy both congratulated her upon the excellence of her performance, and, after the usual exchange of courtesies, they withdrew, the tiger-tamer now leading the way again to that part of the building where his pets were caged.

"You and Miss Slade do not seem to be any too cordial in your relations, Mr. Dumont," said the detective, as they walked along side by side. "I fancied that I saw some evidences of restraint between you."

"Possibly," returned the tiger-tamer; but he made no further comment.

"I hope," he said to the detective, when they at last paused in front of Prince's cage, "that you have no

objection to taking a short stroll through the street with a tiger for company."

"Eh?" said Nick. "What do you mean by that?"

The tiger-tamer smiled, and then he replied:

"I have already told you that Prince is my personal property, as well as my pet, and the object of my particular affection."

"Yes."

"I never leave him here in the care of the animal-tenders. He goes home with me and sleeps in the room with me."

"Do you mean that you take him through the streets of the city?" asked the detective, in surprise.

"Yes; it isn't far."

"I should suppose that the city authorities would object to that."

"I suppose they would if they had an opportunity to do so," replied Dumont, laughing; "but, you see, if I happen to meet anybody on the street when I am leading Prince, and they discover what my companion is, they generally get on the other side of the thoroughfare about as quickly as they can. I never have yet encountered a policeman in any of the cities we have visited who cared to arrest a tiger, and they usually are quite content to look the other way and not see him; moreover, I always select my quarters so near to the location of our production that I haven't far to take him."

He opened the door of the cage as he spoke, and uttered a command in a low tone, whereupon Prince glided from the enclosure, leaped to the ground, and crouched at his master's feet.

From a hook near the top of the cage, Dumont took a headstall and chain, and having buckled the former around the neck and muzzle of the huge animal, he turned to the detective, and said smilingly:

"That contrivance looks as if it might prevent him from using his jaws; but bless you, it wouldn't. And, besides, when a tiger is aroused, his jaws aren't half as dangerous as his feet and claws."

"I can quite appreciate that," said Nick.

"But Prince is perfectly docile when he is with me, Mr. Carter. He will obey my slightest word of command, and he perfectly understands every word I say to him."

"Still, I should think it dangerous to lead him through the street as you say you do."

"No, it is not dangerous; if it were, I would not do it."

"It might be dangerous if you should happen to drop dead some time on the way home."

The tiger-tamer shrugged his shoulders, and his face took on a seriously grave expression, as he answered, with more deliberation than the detective thought was called for under the circumstances:

"I have often thought of that, Mr. Carter, and some times I have seriously considered making arangements with the management to have quarters for myself always inside the enclosure, whether it be a tent or a building, as in the present case."

He shrugged his shoulders again, and was silent for a moment, and then added, in even a more serious tone of voice:

"Possibly, when we have finished our interview this evening, you will advise me for the good of the community at large to do so. But come, if you are ready, we will go now."

He led the way toward the entrance that was nearest, and Nick could see that the man had purposely delayed his departure until the streets outside had resumed their normal condition, which, at that late hour of the night, rendered them sparsely populated.

Indeed, as they passed from the building to the avenue and crossed it, there were not a dozen people in sight in either direction, save for a group of circus employees who were gathered about the door itself.

As they passed from the building they encountered, directly in the doorway, no less a person that Millie Slade, now in her street-costume, and evidently bent upon entering the carriage which was waiting at the curb.

She paused for a moment when she saw the three men with the tiger, and a curiously enigmatical smile, that was almost insolent in its expression, illumined her beautiful face for an instant; and Nick Carter noticed that her eyes were of that peculiar quality and hue which is sometimes described as green.

Very large and expressive eyes they were, with heavy dark lashes shaded by straight, determined brows. She was a wondrously attractive personage, and there was about her a quiet sense of power and determination which even then influenced Nick Carter strangely. But she passed on to her carriage without a word, and with only a nod and smile of recognition.

The detective and his companions crossed the avenue and walked half a block to the eastward, when Dumont led the way up a flight of brownstone steps and into a house for which he carried a key.

"I occupy the entire parlor floor here, Mr. Carter," he said. "The room usually called the back parlor is for the accommodation of Prince; I occupy the front room. Keeping Prince in the way I do is rather an

expensive luxury, for I am compelled to pay all sorts of prices to induce people to take us in. Nevertheless, it is worth the price to me, and I keep the tiger always with me."

"But," said Nick, as he accepted the chair indicated by the tiger-tamer, "what do you do with Prince when you are compelled to go down-town, or to other parts of the city where you cannot take him with you?"

"I was just thinking of that myself," said Patsy. "It wouldn't be healthy for anybody to break in here while you are gone, would it?"

The tiger-tamer laughed.

"I leave him here, of course," he said. "That is part of the understanding when I engage quarters. But he knows what I say to him, and he always waits patiently for my return. No, Mr. Garvan, it wouldn't be just exactly healthy for strangers to break in here while I am away; Prince might hurt them. But I always leave a sign of warning on the door outside, and others in the house are familiar with our habits."

"Well," said Nick, "I suppose the time has come now for you to explain to me the motive that was behind your letter?"

"Yes, Mr. Carter, the time has come for me to explain."

"I am ready," said the detective.

"Very well, sir. As a preliminary, I will make rather a bold statement; but after I make it I will explain in detail what I mean by it."

"Very well."

"The bold statement is this: I am threatened in a manner which I believe will encompass my death unless I take immediate measures to protect myself. I am in more danger of losing my life when I walk upon the streets of the city alone than I ever am when I enter the circular cage containing my twelve tigers. A few moments ago you remarked that I might drop dead on the street some time when leading Prince, but you little knew how truly you spoke when you said it."

CHAPTER III.

THE BAREBACK RIDER'S THREAT.

For a moment after this remarkable statement by the tiger-tamer, Nick Carter regarded the man quizzically.

The reader will remember that men who follow certain professions, occupations, or trades are, as a rule, governed in their methods of procedure by certain qualifications which pertain to each particular class by itself.

For instance, the sailor is inevitably superstitious; so is the showman, although in a distinctly different way.

The lawyer has his own viewpoint of life in general which is entirely distinct from the physician's, just as both of them are different from that of any other professional man.

The snake-charmer lives according to certain rules, and avoids certain conditions as religiously as if they would prove fatal if he adopted them. And it is a remarkable fact that there never was yet a professional animal-trainer, man or woman, who did not dread assassination.

Almost without exception, they will tell you that they have no fear of death from the jaws of their pets, but that they fear only mankind and the human enemies they make.

Nick Carter remembered this as he listened to the remarkable statement made by the tiger-tamer; but he replied by a question, which was:

"Have you an enemy?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who that enemy is?"

"Yes."

"Well, at least that is one advantage. Has your life been threatened?"

"It has."

"By this particular enemy?"

"Yes."

"Are you prepared to tell me who it is?"

"Certainly; otherwise, I would not have summoned you here."

"Well, I am waiting."

"My enemy, Mr. Carter, is the woman to whom I presented you to-night."

"Do you refer to Millie Slade?"

"I do."

"So I was not amiss in my guess when I saw the estraint between you at the time of the introduction."

"No; you were quite correct."

"Do you mean to tell me, Dumont, that you actually fear for your life at the hands of Millie Slade?"

"Just that."

"Don't you think that you are a little bit morbid on the subject?"

"No; I know that I'm not."

"You must, then, have exceedingly good reasons for your knowledge."

"I have; and you will agree with me when you have heard them."

"I hope," said the detective, "that when you asked me to come here you had already determined to be entirely frank with me, in case you made any revelation at all."

"I had."

"Well, what is the story?"

"I scarcely know how to tell it, Mr. Carter. It begins a number of years back."

"Well, tell it in your own way."

"Look at me, Mr. Carter."

"Yes, I am looking."

"I am not exactly the sort of man you expected to see when you received that letter from me this morning, am I? I am not precisely the sort of person whom you would select in passing upon the street as an animal-trainer, am I?"

"No, perhaps not; but I have given that subject no thought, Mr. Dumont. You have just stated that your life has been threatened by Millie Slade, the bareback rider and expert pistol-shot. And now it is up to you to explain to me when and where and how that threat was made."

"That is the difficult part of my communication," replied Dumont.

"Why so?"

"Principally because it involves a confession on my part of a secret—or, rather, the revelation of a secret which I have sworn never to reveal."

"But I understand that you intend to break that oath, is that it?"

"Yes; I feel that I must do so."

"Why should Millie Slade wish to take your life, Dumont?"

"She has two reasons, Mr. Carter, both of which fit together so nicely that they may be explained as one."

"What are they?"

"She wants to get rid of me entirely, and she can only accomplish it through my death; and she is in love with another man, whom she wishes to marry, and she cannot become his wife if I am alive."

"There should be only one reason for that remarkable statement."

"You have guessed it, Mr. Carter."

"Am I to understand that Millie Slade is——"

"Millie Slade in real life is Mrs. James Dumont. She is my wife."

The detective leaned back in his chair, smiling.

"A family quarrel?" he asked, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"I don't know that you could exactly call it a quarrel. It is more in the line of a misunderstanding; I will try to explain."

"Well?"

"Millie Slade and I were married ten years ago. I was at that time an officer in the English army, stationed in India. I was not an animal-trainer by profession, and had no thought of ever becoming one. But I was an animal-trainer by choice, and all my life I had made pets of all sorts of wild beasts. I was born in India, Mr. Carter, as was my father before me, and he and my grandfather were also officers in the English army."

The detective nodded but made no remark.

"I made the acquaintance of Millie Slade while on a furlough, during which time I visited the United States. She was performing at that time with this same circus, but had only been following the profession for a year. I saw her in the ring, was attracted to her, and I sought and obtained an introduction. The result of that meeting, to cut short a long and unnecessary explanation, was that I resigned my commission in the army and subsequently made the engagement with Adam Hindpaugh which I now hold as an animal-trainer and performer."

"Go on," said the detective, when the tiger-tamer paused.

"Millie's performance at that time was that of a bareback rider only. She had never given an exhibition of her skill with pistols and rifle, and I knew nothing of her accomplishments in that way; neither did the circus people. We were married very soon after I resigned my commission in the army, and I took up this life and have followed it ever since."

Again he paused and hesitated a considerable time, but presently went on, saying:

"Although I have been an officer in the English army and have been in many skirmish fights, although I have been accustomed to the use of firearms all my life, and have seen them about me ever since I was born, I, nevertheless, have a superstitious horror of a pistol; and there never has been a moment in my life when I have not dreaded death by one of them. Particularly am I shocked and horrified—the feeling is constitutional with me, and so deep-seated that I cannot overcome it—by a pistol in the hands of a woman. My mother was killed by an accidental discharge of one of them when I was a little child, and that may have had something to do in influencing me."

"Well, toward what does all this explanation tend?" asked the detective.

"It tends toward an explanation of the final rupture between Millie and myself."

The detective nodded.

"We had been married about a month when, to my utter amazement and horror and without my previous knowledge of preparation for it, Millie performed the same act that you witnessed to-night. At the close of the performance that night I demanded of her that she cut it out entirely. She refused and we quarreled. Now, Mr. Carter, I need not go into any further particulars concerning it more than to say that it was the beginning of a series of dissensions between us which within a few months brought about our separation. I believed that I had the right and authority to insist upon my demands; she denied me that right. I wished her to give up entirely her act in the circus and to live quietly as my wife, and as a lady should; she refused. Our separation came about accordingly but none the less effectively; and it was final. As I explained to you a moment ago, we were married ten years ago, and, although we have both been in the employ of this same circus ever since that time, we have continued to live apart; and a remarkable circumstance of the case is that not a person connected with the show is aware of the fact that we were ever married at all."

"Well, what more?"

"I have never ceased to be fond of Millie Slade; she is just as dear to me to-day as she was then, but I am convinced and have been always that I never more than interested her passing fancy, and that she was really satisfied to be rid of me when our separation occurred."

"I think," said the detective, "that you have argued yourself into a morbid condition, Dumont; but, however, you had best finish your story as you began it."

"Very well, sir."

"Go on, then."

"Four or five separate times at intervals of a year or two apart I have attempted a reconciliation with Millie," continued the tiger-tamer, "but each time I have been repulsed, and each succeeding time it was with more determination than ever. It was about a year ago when our present manager took charge of this circus, and I discovered almost at once that Millie was more than ordinarily attracted by him, and that the attraction was mutual.

"You must understand me in this, Mr. Carter: Millie Slade, who legally is Mildred Dumont, is a good woman. I have no complaint whatever to make concerning her in that respect; but during the past year we have had several violent quarrels whenever opportunity offered, and six months ago she made this remark to me:

" 'You will wake up some morning, Jim, in heaven, or the other place, and it will be one of my bullets that sent you there.'

"Since that time on frequent occasions she has made remarks referring to that threat, such as 'Are you preparing for that heavenly trip of yours,' or 'have you engaged a ferryman across the Styx,' or 'Jim, have you made your peace above?"

"Such remarks as those, Mr. Carter, have not been calculated to still my fears induced by that threat. She can write her name with bullet-holes on a target thirty paces distant, firing her pistols so rapidly that you can scarcely count them, and I want to tell you right now that whenever I see Millie Slade exchange a few confidential words with Christopher Powers, the manager, I shudder with apprehension, fearing that bullet with which she threatened me.

"I sent for you as I did asking you to attend the circus to-night and witness our acts, because I wanted you to appear there and see them both, in preparation for giving me the advice I now seek."

"What do you expect?" asked the detective.

"I want you to tell me what I ought to do."

"I can tell you that in just two words," said the detective, smiling as he lighted a fresh cigar.

"What are they?" asked the tiger-tamer.

"Forget it," replied the detective, and he laughed again.

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER'S NEW-MADE FRIEND.

The tiger-tamer was plainly annoyed by the manner in which the detective had received his communications.

"I perceive that you do not take me seriously, Mr. Carter," he said; and Nick replied instantly:

"Certainly not Dumont. Why should I? Ten years or more ago you gave up your position in the English army in order to marry a bareback rider in a circus with whom you had become infatuated. A little later you object to certain things she wished to do which were quite natural to her, and which had become a part of her life. She found out that she was not as greatly infatuated with you as she had supposed, and doubtless welcomed the separation which resulted from your misunderstanding. In your arguments with her concerning the use of firearms she discovered the yel-

low streak in your make-up. She is a woman, a beautiful woman in fact, and not unlike in some qualities of disposition the very tigers of which you make pets; that is, she likes to tease just as a tiger delights in torture; the two are qualifications of the same thing. She discovered that she could make you dread her and even fear her by the firearm threat, and she made use of it. Later she found out that she could tease you about it and keep you constantly in hot water."

The detective turned and waved his hand toward Prince, who was lying asleep in the middle of the floor, and added:

"You trust absolutely that big brute there, but if you should offend Prince deeply enough to anger him, how long do you think he would hesitate to rip you asunder with those savage claws of his or to crack your head in his massive jaws?"

"He would never do it; he would never do it in the world," was the emphatic response.

The detective shrugged his shoulders and left his chair, reaching for his hat as he did so.

"Possibly not," he said, "but, nevertheless, I think you stand in much greater danger from treachery on the part of Prince than you do from the pistols of your wife. I am very greatly obliged to you, Mr. Dumont, for the entertainment you have given Mr. Garvan and myself this night. I ought also to thank you for your confidence,-which I assure you has not been misplaced. What has passed between us will never go any further, but this is not a case for me, Dumont; nor is it one for anybody. If I advise you at all in the matter, it would be to follow one of two courses."

"I know what they would be."

"Nevertheless, I will state them."

"Very well."

"The first is to seek and to accomplish a reconciliation with your wife. The other is in the event that such a thing is impossible, agree with her upon a legal separation. Your lives are passed in such a manner that you can secure a legal domicile in almost any State you are pleased to select, and in many of the States it is possible to secure an absolute divorce on very slight grounds."

The tiger-tamer shook his head, and Nick Carter, stepping forward, extended his hand.

"Good night, Mr. Dumont," he said. "Again I thank you for our entertainment, as also does Patsy."

The tiger-tamer grasped the detective's hand, stood silent for a moment, and then said:

"Wait just a moment, Mr. Carter. Do you suppose that Mr. Garvan will excuse us while I speak to you confidentially and alone?"

"Certainly," said Patsy, without waiting for Nick to reply.

"Good night, Mr. Dumont. Chief, I will wait for you outside on the steps."

He passed from the room leaving the tiger-tamer and the detective alone together, save the presence of the huge animal sleeping on the floor.

"Mr. Carter," said Dumont, after a moment of silence between them. "I have asked you to remain a moment with me for a specific purpose. I want to introduce you again to Prince, and this time in such a manner as the tiger will never forget. You have seen fit to accept my communications to you to-night with incredulity, or, at least, with a degree of indifference which tells me that you do not regard them at all seriously. I do. But I shall not attempt further to influence you."

He paused a moment thinking deeply, and then he continued:

"I am none the less convinced that my life is in danger. I have a premonition upon me, and have had it for the last twenty-four hours that I have not long to live. The time may be a day or a month or several months, but all the same I have the intuitive feeling here"—and he placed his hand over his heart—"that before long a bullet will find its way to my brain or heart; that I will be dead; and that the woman you know as Millie Slade will be my executioner.

"When that time comes, as it will come, when you see the announcement that I have been killed, you will recall this conversation, and in recalling it you will remember Prince.

"Wherever my body is at that time; wherever you may be, I wish you would do me one favor." He paused and his eyes dwelt eagerly upon the face of the detective.

"Well? What is it?" asked Nick.

"I wish you would promise me that in the event of such a thing as I have described, you will travel with all possible speed to the place where my body may be. When you arrive I want you to claim possession of Prince, for I shall leave him to you in such a manner that you will be able to secure immediate possession of him."

"But, great Scott man, what do I want with a pet tiger?"

"I will have left a letter for you to read when you take possession of the animal, which will tell you what to do with him; and Mr. Carter, since you do not at

all believe that I have any just cause for my fears, you certainly should feel no hesitation in making the promise I ask."

"All right," said Nick, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I'll make it."

A glad smile appeared for the moment upon the face of the tiger-tamer, and then he uttered a sharp word of command to the animal sleeping on the floor.

Prince raised his head, blinked for a moment at his master, then got slowly upon his feet, where he stretched and yawned. After that he glided forward to Dumont's side, and the latter, after patting him upon the head and stroking him gently, stooped forward and talked rapidly in the Hindustanee tongue to the beast.

Nick, who understood the language perfectly, exclaimed in the same tongue:

"I understand and speak Hindustanee also, Dumont."

"Splendid," said the tamer. "Now, Mr. Carter, if you will stand there and pay attention and do as I ask, I will make Prince your friend as long as he lives."

The strange man got down upon his knees beside the animal, threw his arms around the tiger's neck, and for five minutes whispered eagerly and rapidly into the creature's ear.

What he said then nobody but he and the animal knew or understood; but the latter acted as if he comprehended every word, and he purred and blinked and winked his eyes and purred again while he was receiving that confidential communication.

At the end of it, Dumont straightened himself, and then pointing toward Nick Carter, he said in Hindustanee:

"Prince, go to your new friend. Some day when I am gone, he will be your master. Tell him that you'll be good."

The tiger with slow deliberation crossed to where Nick Carter stood, and stood for a moment looking up into the face of the detective much as an intelligent dog might have done.

Then slowly he raised himself upon his hind feet and placed a huge pay upon either of the detective's shoulders.

Then he purred softly, first into one and then into the other of Nick Carter's ears, and he rubbed the soft fur of his jowls against the detective's cheeks.

Next he dropped upon all fours again and with his rough tongue licked the detective's hands one after the other; and then he scratched himself upon the floor and rolled over and over twice at the feet of Nick Carter exactly as if he were a huge overgrown faithful kitten.

"Now, Mr. Carter," said Dumont, "do as I did. Get down on your knees beside him, put your arms around his neck, and whisper some words of endearment in Hindustanee in his ears, using his name frequently."

Nick Carter did so, and to his amazement the tiger acted as if he comprehended every word that was said to him.

He showed every evidence of appreciation, and Nick who was passionately fond of animals felt himself drawn to this huge beast, and what had originally been a perfunctory act of the expression of affection now developed into the real thing.

He caressed the tiger sincerely; he patted the beast and talked to it in low-toned Hindustanee; he whispered to it as Dumont had done, and the tiger responded to every advance he made with thorough evidence of appreciation.

At last when he stood upon his feet again, the tiger walked around and about the two men, passing between them and beside them, rubbing his sleek body against them both as he passed; and Dumont laughed in a low tone and with evident joy as he said:

"It is rather wonderful, Mr. Carter, even under the circumstances, that Prince should take to you as readily as he has done. He will be your friend now as long as he lives, for that tiger is almost human in his intelligence. Wherever he is when I am gone, he will be yours. Get to him as quickly as possible when that event happens—and, when it does, please don't forget what I have told you to-night."

"I'll remember," said Nick, "although I still believe that you are mistaken in your conclusions."

"That is as it may be, Mr. Carter; at least, I am now prepared for the event."

"How long does your engagement in the city continue?" asked the detective.

"Four weeks; and, by the way, there is one thing that I nearly forgot to tell you about."

"Yes? What is that?"

"I cannot retain these quarters here. I only took them temporarily, for the house has been sold, and on Thursday of this week I take new quarters for Prince and me."

"Have you secured them yet?"

"Yes."

"Where are they?"

"I have taken a [illegible] apartment on the third floor of a house in Twenty-eighth Street, near Lexington

same respective number as this one. I shall be there after Thursday—if I am alive."

"Nonsense," said Nick. "Forget that part of it."

"Very well, I shall be there after Thursday. I will be glad, Mr. Carter, if you would find several occasions during the New York engagement to come around to the Garden at the close of the performance and walk home with Prince and me."

"All right," said Nick, "I will be glad to do so."

"It will please me to have you do it, and it will afford opportunity for you and Prince to improve your acquaintance."

"Good!" said Nick. "You may expect me; and now I will say good night."

He crossed to the tiger, patting it upon the head and said in Hindustanee:

"Good night, Prince, old boy."

Then he shook hands with Dumont, bade him good night also, and left the house.

CHAPTER V.

THE STUDIO TRAGEDY.

It was the following Monday morning just a week after the receipt of the letter which began this story when Nick Carter, upon spreading open his morning paper, read the following startling announcement:

TIGER-TAMER SHOT.

JAMES DUMONT, MOST EXPERT OF HIS CRAFT STRANGELY ASSASSINATED WHILE SLEEPING.

MYSTERY SURROUNDS ENTIRE AFFAIR.

Animal-trainer Killed by a Bullet Fired by an Unknown Hand, While Pet Tiger was Asleep in Room With Him.

To say that Nick Carter was shocked would be to express his condition of mind with extreme mildness.

We know how little credence he had given to the stated fears of James Dumont, the tiger-tamer; but now it seemed as if the man had had much more reason to fear tragedy than he could explain by mere words. The detective read the article which followed the startling headlines with close attention, but could gain very little more information from that than was established by the words already repeated here.

As the reader has no doubt surmised the tiger-tamer had moved into the new quarters he had described to Nick Carter located in Twenty-eighth Street, in the temporarily unused studio of an artist friend.

Nick Carter had visited him once at these rooms, which looked out upon the street from the third floor of one of the older buildings along that thoroughfare.

It was a building which went up only two stories from the street, and was surmounted then by a mansard roof in which the third elevation was located.

This apartment consisted of two rooms with a lavatory and clothes-closets between them. Nick knew without even visiting the place again that it would be impossible for any one to fire a bullet through a window into that front room from the street; and he realized how entirely impossible it would be for any intended assassin to have entered that room with the tiger there on guard.

But suddenly he started to his feet, seized his hat, and, without waiting for his breakfast or to inform any of the members of his household of his intention, he hurried toward the studio in question, for he had remembered Prince, the tiger, and he very much doubted if any one had been able to approach the body of the dead tamer since the assassination.

As he hurried along the street he feared that even now he might be too late to save the life of Prince, whom the police authorities would not hesitate to shoot in order to gain admittance to the room.

As he approached the house, he saw that already a crowd was collected before the door of it, but he pushed his way past them and ran up the stairs to the third floor where, as he had anticipated, half a dozen policemen were already congregated, and they were at the moment indulging in speculative possibilities for a method to get rid of the tiger.

But Nick had arrived in time; nothing had been done save only that the door had been opened as far as a chain inside of it would permit, and several persons had peered into the room to discover what we have already heard described.

Nick Carter was known to the lieutenant in charge of the officers at the house, and he explained in as few words as possible that he had a personal acquaintance with the dead tiger-tamer, and also that he was on friendly terms with the animal itself.

"I will go inside the room in a moment," he told the lieutenant, "and I will take the tiger out of the way; but first I would like you to explain to me what you know about this affair."

"All that we know about it," replied the lieutenant, "is this: Yesterday afternoon, which was Sunday as you know, about four o'clock, the janitor of the building was passing this door when he heard the tiger whimpering inside. The janitor has been in a state

of terror, he tells me, ever since Dumont and his tiger have lived in the house; but he says there was something so mournful and pathetic about the animal's cries that he stopped in the hallway and listened. After a moment he rapped upon the door, but he received no response and heard nothing whatever save the continued whimpering of the beast.

"Then he called aloud to Dumont, addressing him by name, but after repeated calls, to which he received no response, he gathered courage enough to turn the knob of the door and push it open just a crack.

He saw then that the chain was up inside as it is now, and emboldened by that fact he pushed the door open to the extent of it so that he saw—the same thing that you just now saw, Mr. Carter."

"The body of Dumont stretched upon the couch over there?"

"Yes."

"And that was at what time did you say yesterday afternoon?"

"About four o'clock as nearly as the janitor can fix the time."

"Is he sure that Dumont was dead at the time?"

"Certainly, he could see the bullet-hole in his forehead."

"Well, what next?"

"The janitor closed the door and ran outside to give the alarm. It was Sunday afternoon, and mighty few people were on the street. He says that he looked around for a policeman but could not find one, and so he legged it with all the speed he could muster for the station-house."

"And reported the affair at the desk, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Some officers came around here with him?"

"I came and two other policemen with me."

"Well, what happened since then?"

The lieutenant laughed uneasily as he replied:

"Nothing has happened since then, Mr. Carter; nothing could happen with that tiger in the room. Nobody dared to enter it, and the reporters who followed us around from the station-house made a great story about it."

"Didn't you send for some of the circus people?"

"Yes, we sent far and wide for some one to get that tiger out of the room, but it was Sunday night, and everybody who was capable of accomplishing it was absent, or, at least, could not be found. I have just received word that two men would be sent here at once."

"So," said Nick, "nobody has entered that room since the death of the tiger-tamer?"

"No, sir; you can bet your life on that."

"Stand back away from the door then, lieutenant," said Nick, and he approached it quickly.

But the lieutenant put out a detaining hand and caught him by the arm.

"You're not going into that room, are you?" he asked tremulously.

"I certainly am," replied the detective, smiling.

"But the tiger will kill you."

"On the contrary," said Nick, "he won't hurt me. He'll be glad to see me. Stand aside, lieutenant, and let me pass."

He drew a pair of nippers from his pocket, and, having opened the door to the extent of the chain, severed that impediment, and then with a smile and a nod toward the frightened lieutenant, passed inside the room and closed the door after him.

The tiger was stretched prone upon the floor at the foot of the couch where the body of Dumont was lying; then the animal raised his huge head as Nick Carter intruded upon its sorrow, and, seeming to recognize him at a glance, started to its feet whimpering mournfully as it did so.

Nick, without an instant's hesitation, crossed quickly to the animal, and, dropping down beside it, put his arms around the creature's neck as we have seen him do once before, and began whispering words of endearment to it in the Hindustanee language.

All animal-tamers would tell you here that the smell of blood resulting from the death-wound that Dumont had received should have enraged the tiger to a point of fury; but that was not so, and very rarely is so. The smell of blood does not necessarily enrage such a beast unless they have been taught to associate it with slaughter, or unless they are suffering with the pangs of hunger.

But Prince in all his life had never been fed upon meat that was not cooked and salted, and the smell of blood, therefore, had no significance for him whatever.

The animal seemed to know and to understand that a calamity of some kind had happened.

He looked up into the face of Nick Carter with a strangely mournful expression in his eyes, and then with a sigh of resignation he threw himself upon the floor again at the foot of the couch resting his head between his paws.

The detective, after patting Prince once more by way of reassurance, gave himself up to the task of studying his surroundings and of endeavoring to ac-

count in some way for the untimely death of Jim Dumont.

His first idea had been that the tiger-tamer, unbalanced by the great sorrow of his life, had shot himself to death; but the first searching glance the detective gave around the room convinced him that this was not so, for not only was there no firearm in evidence anywhere near the couch, but there was not one to be seen in any part of the room.

The couch itself was of an ordinary pattern softly upholstered in leather and rather luxurious.

It stood against the wall at one side of the room in a position so that it faced the two front windows, one of which was open at the top, the upper sash having been pulled nearly all the way down. It instantly occurred to the detective that the bullet, which had killed Dumont, might have been fired from the window of a house opposite or from the roof of one of the buildings on the other side of the street.

But when by stooping and placing his own head in close proximity to that of the dead man, he looked into the direction from which the bullet must have come from such a source, he saw at a glance that it was impossible.

There was no window to be seen on the opposite side of the street from the position he took, and there was no spot upon the roof of any house opposite it which could have been made available for such a villainous purpose.

He glanced toward the second window, which was at a different angle from the dead man on the couch, and, although the windows of an upper floor of a house opposite were plainly in view, there were two reasons why the bullet could not have proceeded from there.

One of these reasons was that the window was closed and fastened inside, and the glass must, therefore, have been shattered by any bullet passing through it, and the other reason, quite as significant, was that the wound could not have been inflicted in the position as occupied from that direction.

It might have entered through the open half of the other window, but to do so it must have come out of the window itself, since not even the roofs of the houses in that direction were visible to the eyes of the detective when he was low down and sighted through the window along the angle it would have taken.

Instead, he uttered an exclamation of surprise as he knelt still lower and studied the angle even more closely, for he saw without taking any more exact measurements that the bullet, in order to inflict the death-wound in the forehead of James Dumont as it had done, must have passed so closely to the top of the frame of the window as almost to graze it, if not actually to do so.

Mentally determined to have that measurement and angle taken with absolute exactness before he should permit the body to be moved even so much as the fraction of an inch, Nick Carter got upon his feet, and, after another pat or two upon the head of the crouching tiger, he gave his attention to other portions of the room.

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER'S SLENDER CLUE.

The interior of the studio was not unlike any other apartment of the same character in that locality.

It has been said that it occupied the mansard roof of the building, and we will understand by that fact that the walls slanted inward from floor to ceiling, thus leaving an embrasure at each window.

There was a skylight approximately eight feet square directly over the center of the room, but this was made of ground glass, was entirely opaque, and was firmly and securely fastened by hooks inside; moreover, every pane of glass it contained was perfectly sound, and careful examination quickly developed the fact that not one of them had been disturbed.

Bookcases lined the wall opposite the couch, a square table occupied the center of the room beneath the skylight, easels supporting pictures stood in two of the corners, ornaments and objects of art, paintings and engravings, curios and other articles of the kind were distributed artistically everywhere.

There was nothing to indicate that the interior of the room had been disturbed in the slightest particular; there was nothing to suggest that any other person than Dumont had entered it.

Nick Carter believed it safe to assume that the man and the tiger were alone together in the room when the shot was fired.

Over near the window, which was down at the top, a large easy chair stood almost against the wall. Beside it was a low smoker's table upon which were half a dozen stumps of cigars, a tray well-filled with ashes, a half-emptied match-safe, and a cigar-box which still contained seven unsmoked cigars.

At the other side of the chair on the floor was littered a mass of Sunday newspapers, the latter evidencing the fact that Dumont had spent the greater part of the Sunday in that chair reading and smoking.

As Nick Carter stood in the middle of the room near the table studying the situation, it became evident to him that Dumont, tired of reading and smoking, and contented with the fact that this was his one day of rest from performances at the circus, had thrown himself upon the couch to take a nap.

The tiger-tamer's feet were clothed with a pair of grass Chinese slippers of the half-sandal variety, he wore no waistcoat, collar, or tie, but had donned an old, faded and much-worn smoking-jacket before he lay down to rest. The expression of the dead man's face was such as to indicate that death had come upon him instantly; as if the mere impact of the bullet against his forehead had been sufficient to kill him, or to stun him even if the missile had not penetrated his brain. There was a half-smile upon his features as if he had been dreaming pleasantly when the shock came. His attitude was one of entire composure, indicating that he had had no warning of his approaching doom and no premonition of his fate other than that described to the detective during the interview we have witnessed.

There was just one fact evident to the detective upon which a theory of the crime might be built, and that was that the bullet that had killed Dumont came upon its death-bearing errand through that open window.

But even that surmise could go no further; at least, not for the immediate present.

When Nick Carter had crossed to the window and studied the buildings on the opposite side of the street he could see them plainly enough; but it happened that they were buildings unusually low storied, and the position and situation of the window was such that a bullet fired even from the roof of one of them through the open half of the window, through which the bullet must have come, would have imbedded itself in the wall or in the ceiling of the room where Dumont was killed, six or eight feet above where he was lying, at the very least.

In order that a person who was upon the roof of the only building from whence that bullet could have been fired such a one must have found a means of climbing from six to ten feet into the air above it, and it was palpably evident that this could not have been accomplished without the aid of a step-ladder or of some such thing calculated to perform the same service.

But as Nick Carter stood there at the window looking out through the open part of it where the sash had been pulled all the way down, he chanced to raise his eyes and in doing so made a discovery which instantly interested him.

It was a very slight one indeed, and probably would not have attracted him at all were it not for a certain small and apparently unmeaning incident that had happened on the occasion of a former visit to this study, when he had gone there one night to pass an hour in the society of the tiger-tamer and his pet.

The month was June, as the reader will remember, and the time was now almost the second week of it. June is the month of hóney-bees, and upon that former occasion Dumont had told Nick Carter of a remarkable thing he had seen that same day; remarkable only because it had happened in the City of New York.

It was that he had been troubled that morning by dozens of honey-bees flying about his window and into the room, and in showing Nick Carter where they had entered and expressing his wonder that they had been there at all, he had drawn the detective to the window and pointed to the very spot on the frame of it at the top at which Nick Carter was now looking when he made the discovery that immediately interested him.

In pointing at that spot at the time Dumont had exclaimed:

"Look, Carter, there are two or three of them there yet."

And so there had been at the time; and Nick Carter had stood upon a chair to observe them more closely and to discover if they were in reality honey-bees.

This incident is related only to make the reader understand why and how Nick Carter was enabled to determine that the thing he now discovered had not been there when he was examining that very place in the frame of the window on a previous occasion.

The discovery itself was merely two small holes in the framework of the window; holes that were not more than a quarter of an inch in diameter and which would readily have been made by screws of that size driven into the woodwork.

The detective knew very well indeed that had those two holes been there when he was studying the honey-bees he would have seen them, and he would certainly have remembered them. But he had no recollection of their presence there, and he knew positively that they were of recent creation.

As on that other occasion he drew a chair forward and got upon it, and then with his magnifying-glass he studied them with careful scrutiny.

He saw only what has already been described, with perhaps one additional feature, which was as if the driving in of the screws had brought down against the

wood a hard substance of some kind which had left its indelible impression.

Whatever that substance was it must have been flat and smooth, and without the magnifying-glass the detective would not have discovered the evidence of it at all.

Whatever it may have been, it had been placed there and removed, and that within a very short time, for this Sunday when Jim Dumont was killed was only the third day of the tiger-tamer's occupancy of the studio, and only the second day since Nick Carter's study of the honey-bees.

The detective spent almost an hour in search about those rooms for the screws and the flat object that it held in place, but not only was there no evidence of them to be found, but there was no tool or implement with which a screw might have been driven.

Twice during his search of the apartments he was compelled to go to the door and partly open it to quell the impatience of the officers who were waiting outside, and who several times feared that he had been slaughtered and perhaps eaten up by the tiger; but each time he returned to his task with renewed insistence, determined that he would find some explanation for the mystery before he admitted others.

Time after time he returned to the window and mounted the chair again, and upon the last one of these visits he ran his magnifying-glass over every part and particle of the framework, studying it carefully.

This examination was not without fruit.

He had noticed before, in a cursory and indifferent manner, several scratches and abrasions upon the paint of the window-frame and upon one arm of the chair, and the back of it also, where Dumont usually sat while he was reading his papers.

Now, as he examined them more attentively, he decided that they had been made by the claws of the tiger, although not with violence and evidently without intention. But he was satisfied that for some reason the tiger had approached that window, had stood upon his hind feet near and had reached with his paws toward the open half of it, doubtless resting them first against the arm and back of the chair before he did so.

Satisfied of this truth, he next gave attention to the claws of the tiger, and he instantly discovered traces of the white paint upon two of the claws of the animal's right forefoot.

This he regarded as a significant fact.

For some reason which the tiger was unfortunately unable to explain, the animal had been attracted there without being angered or even excited.

But he had gone to the window. That was evident; and he had stood upon his hind feet, had rested his fore paws first upon the chair and then against the casing of the window, and there were the two screw-holes to give mute evidence that some person had also been near that window.

Nick Carter was convinced that James Dumont had not been instrumental himself in making those holes.

If he had done so there would have been some evidence of the fact left in the apartment. There would have been the smooth plate which seemed to have been pressed against the wood, and there would have been found the screws themselves and the instrument for driving them.

But none of these facts were in evidence.

There was the dead man on the couch with the bullet-hole in his forehead; there was the open window through which the leaden missile must have come to have inflicted that wound; there was the open air above the roofs of the houses opposite it; there were the screw-holes in the window-frame, and that was all.

James Dumont's premonitions of death had come upon him with surety even sooner than he had anticipated, and Nick Carter was called upon to take possession of the tiger, his inheritance, as he had promised the tamer he would do. But more than that.

The detective now felt that it was incumbent upon him to undertake at once and without delay the solution of this mystery.

In effect he had promised the tiger-tamer that he would do so in the event of this untoward circumstance.

Recalling all that Dumont had said to him about Millie Slade at the time of their interview as we have given it here, the detective now felt that there was but little doubt that she had managed somehow to assassinate him, or to have it done for her.

He remembered her green eyes, her level brows and her determined chin and mouth, and he had no doubt that she was quite capable of carrying out a set purpose of this kind, always providing that she had once determined upon it.

He was in the position of knowing by implication who had committed the crime, and the motive thereof, without having the slightest clue to associate her with it.

With a last look about the room, he turned again toward the door to admit the officers.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MARK OF A PENCIL-POINT.

When Nick Carter approached the door and opened it he found the coroner and the coroner's physician awaiting him in company with the lieutenant and the other officers.

"Lieutenant," said the detective, "I am going to ask you and the officers to wait outside the room for a few moments longer while I talk with the coroner. That is, sir," he added to that official, "if you are not afraid to enter this room with me while the tiger is here. I assure you he is perfectly docile."

But the coroner, as well as his physician, utterly refused to enter the apartment while the tiger was there, and so Nick Carter was perforce compelled to lead the animal into the rear room, where he closed the door upon him.

"Now," he said to the coroner, when he had admitted that gentleman, with his physician, "I have already decided upon a partial theory regarding this case, coroner, but I do not care to enlarge upon it at the present moment, since I am by no means certain of my premise; but if you care to assist me there are certain things which I very much wish you to do; you and your assistant who is with you."

"I shall be glad to do anything you suggest, Mr. Carter," replied the coroner.

"Very well, if you and the doctor will step this way I will show you something."

He pointed to the body and then to the bullet-hole in the forehead, and said:

"I wish first to call your attention to the fact that the hole made by that bullet is not the usual round one which I think should appear in this case. It has a ragged and jagged appearance, don't you agree with me?"

"Quite so, Mr. Carter."

"Very well, then, after I have carried out certain preliminaries, which I wish you to consent to, I will ask you to hold an autopsy on this body and find that bullet for me."

"That can be easily done."

"I know; I would like to have you place it in my hands exactly in the condition in which you find it imbedded in the brain of the dead man."

"I will do that."

"I mean that I do not want its shape as you find it altered in any way; not even so much as by the tiniest pressure."

"Very good, sir."

"I would like you also to be able to tell me, judging from the position in which you now find the body, exactly at what angle it entered the brain, so that we may be able to determine by taking careful measurements now exactly at what point the bullet passed through the open window yonder."

"Do you think it came through that open window?" said the coroner in surprise.

"Without doubt."

"But how? Where did it come from?"

"I have not yet determined that."

"It didn't come from the roof of that house opposite."

"I have just told you, coroner, that I have not yet determined the answer to your question. The measurements we will take now, if you are willing to delay your investigation until we do so, will help us to determine that."

"Very well."

Nick stepped to the door again and summoned the lieutenant and said to him:

"Two blocks down on the other side of Broadway, in the building at the southeast corner, there is a civil engineer named Burrell. I wish you would send one of your men to his office, lieutenant, and have him ask Mr. Burrell, with my compliments, if he will come up here for half an hour and bring with him his instruments for taking exact measurements of short angles."

While they were awaiting the arrival of the civil engineer for whom Nick Carter had sent, the detective explained in part the result of the investigations he had already made, and he succeeded in satisfying the official that there was no doubt that this was not a case of suicide, but was one of deliberately planned murder, conceived and carried out with a degree of fiendishness which was almost beyond the comprehension of the average man.

Burrell, who happened to be in his office when the messenger arrived, seized his instruments and came at once, and was soon admitted to the room where Nick Carter and the coroner and doctor awaited him.

It required only a moment for the detective to explain to the young engineer what was desired of him, and then, with the aid of the coroner's physician, who brought his probe into play, the angle of the bullet-hole in Jim Dumont's forehead was established, and from it and by its aid the glass was arranged perfectly in line with the course the bullet must have traveled, between the muzzle of the pistol from which it was fired and the hole in Dumont's forehead.

Long and eagerly, and also silently, the young civil

engineer worked over the problem, but at last he straightened his back, and, standing upright, uttered a sigh of self satisfaction.

"Now, Mr. Carter," he said, "if you will bend down here and look through the glass, you will discover something that will surprise you."

"What will it be?" asked Nick.

"Pardon me if I ask a question before answering yours."

"Well?"

"Did I understand you that the bullet which killed that man must have come through yonder open window?"

"Yes."

"When you look through the glass, Mr. Carter, you will discover that it did not do so."

"I don't agree with you," said the detective.

"When you look through that glass," insisted the civil engineer, "you will find that the bullet could not have come through that open window without leaving on the window-frame a mark of its passage."

"That is," said Nick, "presupposing your calculations are correct, Mr. Burrell."

"I am assuming that they are correct, Mr. Carter, for the reason that I know them to be so. I have taken exact measurements, and I have followed them to the thousandth of an inch. I know them to be correct."

Without further argument the detective got down upon his knees and peered through the lenses of the small telescope, which the civil engineer had arranged for him.

It was as the young man had said.

The lenses of the glass did not point through the open part of the window, but instead they directed his glance against a portion of it, which brought a sudden exclamation of astonishment to the lips of the detective as he started hastily to his feet and crossed the room to the window.

He stepped upon the chair as he had already done so many times since he had entered that room, but he remained there only an instant, returning at once to the glass and peering eagerly through it again.

Having done so, he next sighted along the top of the glass outside of it and then, rising slowly to his feet and without removing his eyes from the point of the window-frame upon which they were fixed, he moved slowly across the room and mounted the chair again.

With a pencil he had taken from his pocket he made the smallest kind of a black dot against the window-frame, and then, producing a pocket-rule, he spent a few moments in making careful measurements and calculations.

Satisfied at length with what he had done, he descended and replaced the chair where it belonged, but again, as if to make sure of his assumption, he returned to the telescope and took another survey through it.

Rising at last to his feet, he was silent for several moments while he thought deeply; then, turning to the coroner, he said:

"Coroner, I wish you would get down there and look through that glass. After you have looked through it and have satisfied yourself as to the point on the window-frame where it directs your eyes, please do as I did and sight from the top of the telescope in order to make sure. Then peer once more through the lenses in order to render yourself doubly certain, and after that keep your eyes upon the point on the window-frame that you have so seen. While you do so, walk toward the window-frame, climb upon the chair which I will place there for you and put your finger as nearly upon the point at which your eyes were directed as it is possible for you to do so."

"All right," said the coroner, "I suppose you know what you're about, even if I don't."

"Oh, yes," replied Nick, "I know what I'm about, all right. One moment, if you please, coroner. Doctor, after the coroner has done as I have directed, I wish you to do exactly the same in every particular. Will you oblige me?"

"Certainly," replied the doctor.

"And you, Burrell—I would like your testimony in this matter also."

"Very good," said the civil engineer.

"Now, gentlemen, if you will proceed, I will presently explain, in part at least, why I have asked you to do this."

The coroner took a considerable length of time in making his sight, but at last he crossed the room as Nick Carter had done a little while before, keeping his eyes fixed upon a certain point of the window-frame as he moved forward, at last climbing upon the chair and reaching out to touch the spot against which his sight had been directed.

But, with his hand almost touching it, he stopped and turned to the detective.

"It isn't necessary for me to mark the place," he said.

"Why not?" asked Nick.

"Because you have already done so."

"Have I?"

"Yes, there is a mark of a pencil-point here on the wood."

"Very good, coroner, you may step down. Now, doctor, if you will please carry out my instructions."

The coroner's physician followed the same careful method that had been pursued by the others, and presently he also got upon the chair by the window and reached out as the coroner had done to touch the designated spot.

But he turned with a smile and remarked:

"I find it as unnecessary as the coroner did to indicate the spot, Mr. Carter. You have already marked it."

"Very good; thank you," said the detective. "Now I desire you both to remember that fact and be prepared to testify to it if it should be necessary."

"We will," they replied one after the other.

"Now, Mr. Burrell, it is your turn," said the detective.

The civil engineer, with a smile upon his face, did as directed, but he, being accustomed to the use of his glass and to running angles and tangents, consumed much less time than they had done, and he was presently able to announce that his investigation took him also to the mark that had been made by the pencil-point in Nick Carter's hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S REMARKABLE THEORY.

"I confess," said the coroner, "that I do not exactly understand the significance of all that business, and I would like to ask you, Carter, what it has to do with my part, that is, with my official part of this case."

"It is your business, is it not, coroner," asked the detective, with a smile, "to ascertain and to announce to the world how James Dumont came to his death?"

"Yes."

"We know by implication already that he was killed by a bullet fired by a person at present unknown to us?"

"Certainly."

"And under ordinary circumstances such would be your verdict if you are not corrected and directed as you proceed?"

"Yes."

"If we were to draw the tangent drawn by the aid of this telescope from the bullet hole to the window; if we were to accept that tangent as absolutely undeniable evidence of the course of the bullet, we would be compelled to assume, by what we know, that the pistol was fired inside the room, since the bullet could not have entered at that window at the angle that seems to have been used without having first penetrated the upper part of that window-frame. Am I right or am I wrong?"

"You are absolutely correct."

"Well, we know beyond the peradventure of a doubt that there was no person inside this room when that bullet was fired."

"Yes, I think we may assume that."

"We know by the architecture of this house that a person could not have hung down from the roof and reached inside the window to fire such a weapon, and there are many reasons why that premise would not be tenable either."

"Yes."

"One of the reasons, and the only really important one, is that if a person had reached inside the window to fire a pistol at the sleeping man it would not have been at that angle, and the pistol could not have been held where it must have been held to fire that particular bullet."

"Yes, I quite agree with you."

"Now, coroner, there is no mark in that window-frame to indicate that a bullet has passed through it."

"No; certainly not."

"And has it also occurred to you that a bullet could not pass through that window-frame at that angle without also passing through a good many inches of wood and slate also?"

"That's true, Mr. Carter, I haven't thought of that."

"And yet, coroner, in view of all that, we are confronted by the unmistakable and positive evidence that the bullet must have come through that window in order to have inflicted the wound it did. It was not self-inflicted, since there is no weapon here, and you will agree with me that the man died instantly."

"Yes."

"It was not fired from inside the room because the door was chained inside and there was no possibility of any persons entering the room and leaving it without establishing evidence of the fact."

"That is true."

"Yet the bullet entered the room [illegible] and killed the man. There is your proof of that [illegible] upon the couch. Yonder" [illegible]

window—"is the only place where the bullet could have entered without leaving the mark of its passage."

The coroner nodded.

"Therefore," said the detective, with emphatic decision, "although it seems impossible, yet we are brought face to face with the undeniable evidence that the bullet entered there," and he pointed toward the open window.

"Burrell's measurements must be wrong," said the coroner, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Burrell's measurements are correct; I am satisfied of that," replied the detective.

"Then how could a bullet enter that window without leaving a mark?"

The detective smiled broadly and replied:

"I once upon a time heard a story about a man who had killed a hundred pigeons that had alighted upon a hay-stack and all around it, on every part of it. He was a smooth liar, that fellow, and he explained the impossible feat by asserting that he bent the barrel of his gun so that it represented a quadrant, and then, by standing close to the hay-stack and firing the gun the bullet passed round and round it until it had killed every pigeon that had lighted there."

"Oh, nonsense, I heard that myself when I was a boy," said the coroner, with a shrug.

"I have only referred to that story, coroner, for the purpose of preparing you for an illustration I am about to make."

"Well, what is it?"

"Come here to the window with me for a minute; you also, doctor; and you, Burrell."

They followed him to the window beside the chair in which Dumont had been seated when he read his papers, and he pointed upward toward the spot where he had made the mark with his pencil-point.

"Can you see the mark of my pencil from here, gentlemen?" he asked them.

They agreed that they could do so.

"Now, I will call your attention to two holes exactly in line with the pencil-mark and directly below it. Do you see them?"

They agreed that they did.

"If you should take my magnifying-glass, as I have done, and search the woodwork around those holes and the pencil-mark, you would discover as I did that a flat, smooth object, probably of metal, has been pressed snugly against the woodwork."

"Well, what of that?" asked the coroner.

"It has proved to me, gentlemen, that a plate of metal had been screwed fast there before the bullet was fired and has been removed since that time."

"But how could it be removed, supposing it to be there, and what good would it have done being there?" demanded the coroner.

"One question at a time, if you please."

"Well, answer the last one first. What object could have been attained by placing it there?"

"A very simple one, coroner, when you stop to think of it."

"It may be simple enough, only I don't see it."

"If such an object as I have described was screwed to that window-frame, coroner, it was done with only one purpose in view."

"And what is that?"

"It was placed there to deflect the bullet that was fired against it."

"By thunder!" exclaimed the coroner.

"It was placed there after careful measurements had been made so that a person standing at some given point outside the building, perhaps down on the pavement of the street itself, could send a bullet against it, and the bullet, striking the smooth surface of steel, would be deflected at a right angle or at an acute angle, as the performer might desire."

"That sounds to me like a theory that is rather far fetched, Mr. Carter."

"And yet, coroner, it is the only theory that in this particular case will hold water."

"Perhaps so, but it looks to me like rather a leaky vessel at that."

"Possibly it is so; but there are certain matters in connection with this case that would render it much more simple if you were familiar with them."

"What are they?"

For a moment the detective hesitated, and then he replied with slow deliberation:

"I will assume a case, coroner, with your permission."

"Very well."

"Do you happen to remember Ira Paine?"

"What, the world-renowned pistol-shot of that name?"

"Yes, I referred to him."

"Well, what of him?"

"Let us assume for a moment that Ira Paine were alive now; let us also assume that instead of going about the world giving exhibitions of his marksmanship he had sought employment in a vaudeville theater, we will say, and instead of devoting himself to straight shooting he gave his time and attention to eccentric marksmanship."

"I don't for the life of me see what you're getting at, Carter, but I suppose you know."

"Suppose that Ira Paine were eternally creating new and astonishing feats of marksmanship, and suppose that in one of them he tried to emulate the man with a crooked gun who killed the pigeons on the hay-stack.

In a word, suppose he tried to hit the bull's-eye of a target at right angles from the direction in which he pointed the pistol."

"Well?"

"You would say on the face of it that such a feat would be impossible, wouldn't you?"

"I should be very much inclined to say so."

"But don't you understand, coroner, that by constant and continued practise he could ultimately manufacture a steel plate smooth on the inside of it from which, if he held it at a certain spot, a bullet would be deflected at exactly right angles from the way he fired it, very like the angle a billiard-ball usually takes?"

"Why, yes; I should think that such a thing would be mathematically possible."

"Very well, coroner, that is all."

"But I say, Carter, do you mean to insinuate that the thing you have described has been done here?"

"What I mean to say is that the bullet could not have been fired through that window and find its mark by any other means."

The coroner stood gazing at the detective in open-mouthed amazement, and at last for want of something else to say, he demanded:

"But I say, Carter, that brings us back to the other question."

"What was it; I had forgotten."

"If the steel plate were there as you have described and it seems utterly preposterous to me—how was it put there in the first place, and, what is more important, how was it removed after the man was shot?"

"I don't think," said the detective, "that under the circumstances as I know them to have existed, it was a difficult matter to take measurements and to put a steel plate in place on that window-frame."

"Why not?"

Dumont did not come here to these rooms to live until last Thursday, late in the day. It was known before he had come here that he had engaged this studio. I have reason to suppose that his habits were very well known to a person who would be interested in taking his life. This studio was furnished completely when he engaged it. Such a person as I have described, coming to these rooms a day or two before he occupied them, might easily have taken the measurements required and have gone away prepared to carry out a well-defined purpose."

"Do you mean that the steel plate might have been screwed in place at that time?" asked the coroner.

"No; I happen to know that it was not; the plate was not put on the window-frame as late as Friday night. It was not put there until Saturday night."

The coroner shrugged his shoulders and frowned; he strode to the end of the room and back again impatiently, and then he blurted out the question:

"Well, Carter, suppose that everything you have said so far were true, I have still got you stalled by the remaining question, which is: How was the thing taken out after the murder was committed?"

"Coroner," replied the detective, "I have already determined the answer to that question in my own mind, and I have purposely waited until you were present here with me to prove my theory correct or false. If it is correct we will work ahead upon it to the ultimate conviction of the person who killed Dumont. If it is false—if I do not find in that window-frame what I shall now seek in your presence, I will admit that I am entirely in the wrong, and I will say that the murder of James Dumont will ever remain a mystery."

CHAPTER IX.

A TARGET AT RIGHT ANGLES.

The detective stepped forward closely beneath the window-frame and, pointing upward again, indicated the two screw-holes that have been so often referred to.

"If my theory about this matter is correct," he said, "I will find imbedded in those screw-holes a substance which will be neither steel nor wood. If screws had been used to hold the steel plate in place and if they had been broken off inside we would find the steel there, would we not?"

"Yes."

"If screws had been used to hold the steel plate in place and they had been removed in an ordinary way there should be nothing in the hole, should there?"

"No."

"If pegs had been used to hold the steel plate in place after the holes were made with a gimlet, we would now find wood inside them, don't you think?"

"Yes."

"But if a substance like stiff putty, for instance, had been crowded into holes so made and pressed there until it hardened sufficiently to hold the plate two things would be accomplished. First, some of the putty would remain in each of the holes to testify to its use. Second, the jar of a bullet against the steel plate after the putty had hardened would dislodge the plate so it would fall into the street and in being dislodged it would carry with it enough of the putty to make those holes appear as they are now."

"It all sounds very fine," said the coroner, "and perhaps it is logical, I don't know; but I would like to ask you this question before you go any further."

"Well, what is it?"

"A little while ago you spoke of having discovered with your magnifying-glass the impression made by a steel plate against that window-frame."

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Carter, it strikes me that there is one point that has not occurred to you."

"What is that point?"

"This: While a steel plate might have been drawn

up against that woodwork with screws sufficiently strong to have left its impression there, the thing could not be done with putty."

The detective smiled as he replied slowly:

"I did not anticipate that question, coroner, but nevertheless I am prepared for it."

"How will you answer it?"

"Do you not understand, my dear sir, that a steel plate such as I have been attempting to describe could not be fastened snugly in such a manner with the mere aid of putty alone?"

"Well, haven't you just said that it was done in that way?"

"No; I said that screws were used first."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that when the person came here to put that plate in place it was first screwed fast to the window-frame with ordinary screws and a driver. Almost immediately one of the screws was removed and the hole packed with putty, which was pressed snugly into place, after which the operator waited fifteen or twenty minutes, or even half an hour, for that first plug of putty to set and the rimming of the screw-hole in the steel plate would give a riveted effect to the putty outside. Do you follow me?"

"I think so."

"After the plugging of the first hole and after time had been allowed sufficient for it to set, the second screw would be removed and the same operation followed out; and after that the schemer and plotter would need only to wait a few minutes to be satisfied that no ordinary jar would displace it. The schemer could leave here satisfied at least that so much of the plot was consummated."

"But, Carter, you haven't taken into consideration the fact that Dumont, seated in this chair here all day Sunday, or nearly so, reading his papers, and having dragged the top half of his window, must have discovered that steel plate up there."

"Well, what of it?"

"Wouldn't he have wondered what it was?"

"Probably."

"Why not?"

"I don't think it would have attracted his attention at all. He probably assumed that it was placed there by his friend from whom he hired the apartment and he was not sufficiently interested in it to question it."

"I should have investigated it," said the coroner.

"Possibly; but you and Jim Dumont are entirely different characters."

"I cannot agree with you as to that."

"Anyone who has traveled for years [illegible] as Dumont has, especially since in the winter time, [illegible] for a week or two, or three at the most, in one place, a man like him is not given to [illegible] a small thing like the steel plate I have described would neither attract him nor interest him. It is commonplace to an alien, and he bestowed no more glance upon it than upon the window itself. I had known him only a short time, but I had already discovered that he was a crank at having plenty of air and he preferred to have it enter at the top of his windows instead of at the bottom."

"Well, what does all this signify?"

"Simply what I have stated in preparation for my further investigation."

"You were about to test your theory?"

"Yes."

"And you expect to find particles of putty still imbedded in those screw-holes?"

"Putty or bread dough or plaster of paris; one of the three, although I incline to the first one I have named rather than to the others."

"Why so?"

"Because putty would harden fast enough and securely enough to answer the purpose; bread dough would not be reliable and plaster of paris would smear things in a way that might betray its presence and use."

"Therefore putty, eh?" asked the coroner.

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, go ahead and test your theory."

"No, coroner, I am going to ask you to do it for me."

"I? How so?"

"Climb upon this chair, if you please. From it you will be able to reach those screw-holes. Take this penknife, which is open. It will answer the same purpose as a brad-awl and it is longer and more slender. Dig with it into those screw-holes, coroner, and tell me what you find."

The coroner with some evidence of reluctance mounted the chair; slowly, with the little instrument handed to him by Nick Carter, he began at once to prod in the depths of one of the screw-holes.

As he did so an expression of amazement came upon his face, and, holding the palm of his left hand so that it would catch and receive whatever particles of substance might fall, he presently extended the hand downward toward the detective, exhibiting what he held.

Nick Carter perceived it with a smile of satisfaction; the coroner's physician gazed upon the contents of his chief's hand in utter astonishment.

Unmistakable particles of hardened putty were there; and yet they were not so hard as another day or two would have rendered them.

"You see," said the detective, as he assisted the coroner down from the chair, "my theory is established. I purposely left the testing of it until I should have some one with me to prove any assertions I might afterward be called upon to make before a jury or court. You can both testify to the fact that I explained fully to you what I expected to find, and that afterward I found it."

"Yes," they both agreed.

"So," continued the detective, "you see that the assassin removed the evidence of the crime by the same act that committed it."

"I see," said the coroner.

"The plate being in place would deflect a bullet accurately in a certain direction, if fired from a stated point and with absolute skill."

"There can be no doubt of that," agreed the coroner, "but where would you find a person so skilled?"

"That is a question which I am not yet prepared to answer," said the detective. "We must first determine if our premise is correct. After that it will be time enough to establish the identity of the doer."

"There still arises the difficulty of the adjustment of the steel plate," suggested the coroner's physician.

"This case," replied the detective, "possessed one advantage, so far as I am concerned, from most others with which I am brought into relation."

"What is it?"

"A week ago to-night I held a long interview with poor Jim Dumont. He told me at that time certain things connected with his career by which I was assured of the identity of his murderer, or at least the identity of the person who instigated it, the moment I knew he had been killed.

"Knowing that identity, or at least believing that I did so, I was enabled to begin the working out of my theories on almost an assured basis.

"If you are given a problem to solve you have certain stated quantities from which you adduce the result you seek.

"In this particular case, when I began upon it a little while ago I had the following facts to go by:

"First: I knew that James Dumont's life had been threatened.

"Second: I knew that the person who had made the threat was and is as skilled a pistol-shot as ever Ira Paine was in his palmiest days.

"Third: I knew that a part of the exhibitions of skill given by that person in the past had been what we would call freak shooting.

"Fourth: Two years ago I saw that very person in giving an exhibition of skill perform precisely the same remarkable feat that I described to you a little while ago, made by planting a bullet in the bull's-eye that was fixed directly at right angles in the direction with which the pistol was aimed. I saw that accomplished and saw how it was done; and it was made possible by the use of a steel plate such as I have described here.

"So you see, gentlemen, that after all my working at this theory is not so remarkable or wonderful as you might have otherwise supposed. I have the benefit of the knowledge I have already explained to you, and with this basis to work upon, it was not difficult to find an answer to my problem.

"I will admit that the greatest problem of all was the disappearance of the plate.

"I felt all along since I [illegible] in this room that if I could explain [illegible] of the circumstances pertaining to myself I would have no difficulty in concerning the [illegible]

"I knew as soon as I discovered the screw-holes in that window-frame how the murder had been accomplished, but I did not know, and at first I could not conjecture, how the steel plate had been removed after it had done its work.

"It was only after you two had entered the room with me, when I was still pondering upon the subject, that the answer occurred to me."

"Did I understand your idea to be, Carter, that the impact of the bullet against the steel plate dislodged it so that it fell into the street and was picked up by the person who fired the shot?" asked the coroner.

"Without doubt. There is no place outside the building for it to have lodged. Falling from that window-frame outside, as it did, it must have fallen into the street."

"But," said the coroner's physician, "let us get back again to that part of the act when it was put into position. How did you figure it out that that was done, Mr. Carter?"

"Very simply," was the reply.

"I would like to hear your explanation as to that."

"It is this, doctor. Jim Dumont was in the habit of going quite early each day to the circus, where he performed, no matter whether they happened to be engaged in New York City or elsewhere. He did it because he liked to be with his animals an hour or so before he exhibited them. His habits were known, and it would have been a very simple matter for the person who meant to accomplish his death to have come here after he had departed for his evening at the circus. The measurements necessary to the placing of the steel plate were doubtless taken before he moved into the place at all. It became necessary then to spend only enough time here to screw the plate fast to the window frame, and then to remove the screws as I have described, and supply their places with putty."

CHAPTER X.

THE CHALK MARK ON THE PAVEMENT.

"There is still another point," said the coroner, "before I shall entirely adopt your theory of the matter."

"Very well," said the detective, "let us clear up everything as we proceed."

"If all of this plan that you have outlined is the correct one; if the steel plate was employed as you have said in the murder of James Dumont; if the bullet was fired against it from the street below, and was deflected until it found its mark in the victim's brain, there is still one very necessary gap in your [illegible] to fill."

"What is it?"

"We must presuppose that the assassin had knowl-

edge that at a certain hour Sunday afternoon James Dumont would lie down on that couch in exactly the position he now occupies as if he were doing it purposely to be killed."

"This time," said the detective, smiling, "I had anticipated your objection. I had already thought of that point, and I have found an answer to it."

"Well, what is it?"

"Every gambler, coroner, takes chances, and every man and woman in the world, particularly in professional life, are more or less gamblers by instinct. When you come to that part of professional life which includes showmen, you find the gambling element still more dominant."

"Well, what does all that lead up to?"

"Coroner, if I take you and the doctor entirely into my confidence, may I rely absolutely upon your discretion until such time as I am willing for you to speak?"

"You certainly may."

"Know, then, that I believe the person who committed this crime to be a woman; that I believe that woman to be no other or less a personage than the world-renowned and wonderful equestrienne and daredevil snapshot, Millie Slade, as she is quoted and emblazoned on the bill-boards."

"My goodness, Carter, do you mean that?"

"Millie Slade, too, is the one who I told you had threatened Dumont; she is the one I referred to a little while ago as having seen make the right angle target two years ago. She was the wife of that dead man yonder; she married him ten years ago and lately she has been anxious to achieve another husband."

"But what of all that?"

"This, coroner: She knew and was familiar with more or less of Dumont's habits; doubtless she was much more familiar with them than even he suspected. When she discovered that he had taken these rooms there is no doubt that the idea was born then to murder him as she finally accomplished the act. When she came to these rooms, as she doubtless did, it probably was not with the idea of taking measurements of the act she finally committed, but to begin laying her plans for some such tragedy which we know now has occurred.

"In looking about this room and studying it, she was not long in discovering that easy chair by the window and the couch over yonder against the wall where the body of Dumont lies.

"Don't forget for a moment that she knew his habits. Don't forget that she was aware of the fact that he liked to spend his Sundays in smoking, reading the daily papers and sneaking, and don't forget that it is an invariable custom among such people to sleep away the afternoons of Sundays, particularly in the case of men of his temperament, who smoke much and read much and from very inactivity become drowsy.

"Suppose that we were here now at this moment [illegible] preliminary investigations.

"She would stand yonder near the corner of the room and, discovering this easy chair by the window with a smoker's table beside it, would say to herself at once:

"'There is where he will sit while he smokes and reads his papers. Perhaps I could shoot him from the street through the window.'

"Then she would see the couch over there against the wall, and she would say to herself:

"'Yonder is where he will lie down to take his afternoon nap.'

"Now, coroner, we are already fairly well satisfied of her deliberation and craftiness, and so can't you imagine her stretching herself upon that couch in order to discover just about in what position he would be apt to lie? and having placed herself as nearly as she could conjecture in the position he would assume; can't you imagine her marking out a spot where his head would rest and then suddenly remembering her wonderful skill at the right angle shot with the steel plate she has unerringly used so many times in her target practise?"

"By Jove, Carter, you seem to be working it out all right."

"Added to her desire to murder the man, she had the additional incentive of working upon the possibility of his taking his nap; upon the possibility of his assuming in effect the position she supposed he would, and she had to calculate upon passing through the street below here at about the right hour of the afternoon with one of her target pistols concealed in the folds of her dress, and of firing that shot from a chalk-marked spot on the pavement against the steel plate to accomplish the required deflection of the bullet.

"You must understand that the woman could not positively know that the man was even inside the apartment at that moment. Instead of lying upon the couch for his afternoon siesta, he might have gone into the other room and thrown himself upon the bed. All those things were gambler's chances which she took, and which added infinitely to the zest of her undertaking.

"Again was the chance that she might be discovered in the act of firing her pistol in the street. She had to look out for that. It isn't unlikely that she was compelled to walk up and down the block several times before the desired opportunity came; for when it did come and she had fired the shot she could walk deliberately away almost certain in her own mind that the secret of her remarkable performance would never be revealed.

"But, gentlemen, the next moments of the interview I held with her husband a week ago this coming night; she could not know that, in addition to the knowledge gained by me at that interview, I had seen her right angle shot two years ago.

"Now, my friends, I have taken you entirely into my confidence. I believe that the woman we know as Millie Slade fired the bullet that killed James Dumont, the gambler. There will be no difficulty

in establishing a sufficient motive for the crime, and I believe there will be even less difficulty to prove that she did it."

"But how will you establish that fact?"

"Coroner, it has not rained for several days. If all my theories are correct, I should find out there in the street on the pavement a chalk mark. It need not be very large or well defined, but it would indicate to her where she should stand when the bullet was fired according to the measurements she had taken.

"We will go out presently and look for that chalk mark, and if I find it I will make another mark there which cannot be obliterated at once.

"That done, I will search for the steel plate which Millie Slade uses in her right angle target practise. It is a small affair, but she would not readily part with it for the reason that she is likely to be called upon at any time to reproduce the act.

"If I find the steel plate in her possession; if the rimmed screw-holes fit over these holes in the window-frame, the rest will be comparatively easy, and I imagine that it will not be difficult to force Millie Slade into a full confession of her crime.

"One more thing, coroner, before we leave these rooms and permit the policemen and the undertaker to enter them."

"Well, what is it?"

"Don't forget, if you please, the request I made of you immediately after your entrance here."

"What was it? I have forgotten."

"I wish you to get that bullet for me. I will want to compare its shape after its contact with the steel plate and with the skull of the man it killed with another bullet which I will presently fire into this room in very much the same manner."

"Great Scott, Carter, I hope you are not going to kill another man in order to prove your theory!"

"Hardly that," replied the detective, smiling, "but will you remember to do what I asked?"

"Certainly."

"When you make the autopsy, have a little box of cotton in your pocket and drop the bullet into it. Now, if you are ready, we'll go."

"To look for the chalk mark?" asked the doctor.

"Yes," said Nick, "to look for the chalk mark on the pavement."

"What about the tiger?" asked the coroner.

"I will send one of the policemen for a carriage and I will take the animal to my own home inside of it."

"I've got a carriage at the door," said the coroner. "You may use that if you think the beast won't tear it to pieces."

"I will guarantee you as to that, coroner, and now, gentlemen, I hope you're not afraid of the animal, for I assure you that he is perfectly docile. If you are willing I will call him and take him to the carriage."

The detective opened the door to the rear room and in soft-toned Hindustanee he called:

"Come here, Prince, my friend, come here," and, following out the instructions that had once been given him by Dumont, he caressed the tiger as before, whispered endearing terms into its ears, and presently led it quietly into the hallway and down the flights of stairs to the street.

It was noticeable that the policemen, one and all, drew backward away from him, as far as the walls would permit them to do, until he had passed well beyond their reach with the tiger.

The animal seemed to know that some sort of sorrow had befallen it, for it walked along with some outward evidence of dejection, and offered no resistance whatever when told to get inside the carriage that waited at the door.

Commanding it to lie still, which the tiger obeyed by dropping its jowls between its paws on the floor of the carriage, the detective left it there and began his search along the pavement of the street for the expected chalk mark.

But the coroner and the doctor, both now deeply interested in Nick Carter's theories, were already searching eagerly for the sign, and before Nick Carter had taken half a dozen paces toward them the coroner called out excitedly:

"Here it is, Carter. At least there is a chalk mark here. It's a letter."

Then, as Nick Carter drew nearer to him, he called out again:

"No, by Jove, there are two letters, although one of them is almost obliterated."

"Nick Carter, approaching the spot, bent forward and then, straightening himself, said to the coroner:

"M. S., the initials of Millie Slade's name."

CHAPTER XI.

THE STEEL PLATE.

When Nick Carter arrived at his own home it was almost noon, and he found Patsy and Chick both there waiting the call of the luncheon-bell.

Joseph, who opened the door to admit the detective, started back with a cry of alarm when he found himself looking into the eyes of the huge tiger, but a word of reassurance from the detective calmed him, and Nick led the creature into the library, where the animal stretched itself upon the rug and again subsided into drowsiness.

It was so perfectly docile and seemed so thoroughly to have accepted Nick Carter as its new master that he had no hesitation in leaving it there after he had closed the doors and the windows, although the latter would have offered no impediment to its egress had the tiger thought to escape.

At the luncheon-table the detective described everything that had happened to him that morning and

explained in detail the theories he had formed regarding the crime.

Although Chick and Patsy were both very much interested in the recital, neither offered any suggestions to their chief when he had finished.

"There is one thing," he said in conclusion, "that I neglected to ask Dumont at either of the interviews I had with him. I should have questioned him about the attitude of the tiger toward Millie Slade. I wish I knew that."

"Why?" asked Patsy.

"Because it has suddenly occurred to me that it might be possible to make the tiger of some use in proving this case against her. You see, I haven't any doubt whatever in my own mind that she fired the bullet that killed Dumont. Neither have I any doubt that she visited those rooms in his absence and therefore also in the absence of the tiger, to take her measurements for carrying out the crime; but I have reason to suppose—and very good ones, I think—that although Dumont was not aware of the fact that she had visited those rooms, Prince, the tiger, was."

"Why? How is that?" asked Chick.

"A tiger is a very strong-nosed animal. That animal sense of smell would inform it unerringly that Millie Slade had been in that room if she did go there. The tiger unfortunately cannot tell us about it. Dumont, being dead, cannot describe to us what the conduct of the tiger may have been when he returned to his rooms after she had doubtless been there.

"But I am satisfied that the tiger knew she had been there, and that he followed her scent around the room, partly climbing upon the big chair and even placing his paws against the window into which she had climbed in order to take her measurements and make certain marks by which she would proceed later on when the time came to fasten the steel plate in place.

"And there was more than one set of scratches, I think, against that window-frame and casing.

"You can imagine, can you not, how, upon entering that room with its master after the performance, the tiger would at once scent the recent presence of Millie Slade? Can't you, in your imagination, see the animal snuffing about the room, finally going to the window?"

Both the assistants nodded.

"And then take the second visit, which was also necessary for putting the plate in place. The tiger must have again smelled about the room suspiciously, and probably he again climbed up at the window."

"What I don't understand," said Patsy, "is why she should have selected that particular window."

"There are two reasons why she would do that, Patsy."

"What are they?"

"One was that it offered the best angle for the use of the steel deflector, and the other was that it had a tooth in the easy seat and another's nails which she knew perfectly well he would use; and, knowing that he would use them, she also knew enough of his habits to be perfectly certain that he would drop that particular window at the top before he seated himself to read and smoke and that he would leave it down when later on he went to take his siesta."

"It looks as if she had calculated every point to a nicety," said Chick.

"As without doubt she did do," agreed the detective.

"Tell me," said Patsy, "how the attitude of the tiger toward Millie Slade would affect your use of him in this case?"

"I don't know exactly," replied the detective. "It would depend entirely upon what that attitude happened to be."

"Well, if he were friendly to her?"

"I don't know," repeated the detective. "The idea sticks to me that I ought somehow to make the tiger useful. The animal was so fond of Dumont and is so suspicious that it seems that he ought to be able to tell me something by his acts; and yet I do not know how to make use of him."

"Suppose you try it on him, anyhow," suggested Chick.

"Suggest a way of doing it and I will."

"Couldn't you somehow bring Millie and the tiger together?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, and I fail to understand what good it would do if I did so, and, not knowing what its previous attitude toward Millie was, I would be unable to tell by its demeanor whether it had seen her lately or not."

"What are your plans about the case, chief?" asked Patsy.

"I have only one definite plan, my lad, and that is to search for and find the steel plate that Millie used in committing the tragedy."

"More than likely that is at the bottom of the river or thrown into the ash-can and by this time has found its way into the possession of a junk dealer."

"I don't think so," said the detective. "You must understand, Patsy, that that plate was made with a great deal of care and with a great deal of labor and expense. In order to hit a target with it as she does when she gives her exhibitions, the plate must be absolutely correct. There is no doubt in my mind that she shot bullets into it a thousand times before she got it right; there isn't any doubt in my mind that the values it above, or at least equal to, any of her possessions."

"Do you think," asked Chick, "that she would be likely to keep it at her rooms where she lives or among her effects at the circus?"

"I should say that it would be in her property-trunk at the circus," replied Nick.

"In that case," said Patsy, "I've got an idea."

"Very well, let's have it."

"I'll steal the trunk."

"Patsy, you always were original. When and how would you accomplish it?"

"I'd wait until after the performance to-night and I don't know how I'd accomplish it, only that I would do it somehow."

"But it seems hardly necessary to steal an entire trunk in order to obtain a small steel plate that probably isn't more than half a dozen inches square."

"It's because it's so small that I suggested stealing the trunk. I wouldn't have time to search the trunk for the plate, but I might be able to get away with the trunk itself; and that suggests another idea, chief."

"Go on, Patsy, you seem to be prolific of ideas to-day."

"Maybe I could get away with the trunk between the afternoon and evening performances to-day. I think the expenditure of a few dollars would accomplish it; and my idea about it is this: If I could get the trunk out of the Garden and get it here to this house or to some other place that we could agree upon, she would sure be just too wild to recover it and its contents."

"There is no doubt of that."

"Well, after I'd been through it and found the steel plate, I'd put everything back just about as I discovered it, and then I could go to her and tell her that I had nailed a couple of thieves who had stolen her trunk and I could bring her around here to identify it."

"What would be the good of that?"

"Why, it would be a lovely good opportunity to introduce her to the tiger."

"Yes; but I don't see what would be accomplished."

"Nor I, chief, except the recovery of the plate. If the steel plate is in that trunk and we got the trunk, we'd sure get the plate."

"All right, Patsy, if you think you can accomplish it, you can go ahead."

We need not follow Patsy on his undertaking, nor explain it definitely, but the fact remains that between half-past five and six o'clock that same afternoon a hack drove to the door of Nick Carter's house and out of it climbed Patsy and two other men who assisted him in removing the huge trunk from the box of the cab, which they carried at once inside the detective's house.

Nick Carter was not at home at the time, but that did not deter Patsy from continuing his investigation, and he soon had the lid of the trunk flung back and the trays out of it, after which, with great care, he lifted the contents article by article, placing them in consecutive order upon the floor so that he would have little difficulty in restoring them to their proper positions.

Several times during this operation he paused and critically examined some article that he lifted from the trunk, believing for a moment that he had found the coveted treasure, but in each case he got it able to continue his investigations, and so he proceeded until the bottom of the trunk was visible.

But there, just as he began to despair and to think that he would have to find the steel plate some day Millie Slade in the tragedy, he uttered an exclamation of joy and, darting forward until his head was lost in the huge receptacle, he raised an object in view which he knew must be the object he sought.

It was a steel plate highly polished and strangely and wonderfully grooved inside; although the surfaces of it were perfectly smooth and straight, two screw-holes rimmed out to receive the heads of screws perforated it, and attached to them by a string was a tiny parcel wrapped in cloth which by the feel of it he knew contained the screws themselves.

But this was not all. Patsy recalled perfectly every word that Nick Carter had told him about the investigation of his theory at the studio apartment, and as he lifted the steel plate from the trunk and held it up to view under the electric light, which he had switched on for more perfect observation, he discovered two or three tiny particles of putty still clinging to the sides of the rimmed-out screw-holes. Even as he made this discovery Nick Carter, followed by Chick, entered the room.

Perceiving what Patsy held in his grasp, he stepped forward and took it, examining it critically as he did so, and presently he said:

"Patsy, you have found the thing we sought. You have clinched the case so that there will be no way out of it for Millie Slade. And now, instead of bringing her here to face the tiger, which I think is entirely unnecessary, you may return the trunk to her in any way you choose."

"That's dead easy," said Patsy. "I can get it back to her without her having the least idea that it was stolen. One of the performers quit the circus this afternoon and sent a baggage-man for her trunk. I was there at the time looking about for an opportunity to get away with Millie's properties and—well, to make a long story short, chief, I bribed some of the attendants to bring out the wrong trunk. All I've got to do now is to return it and have the exchange made and she'll get her property back before she knows it was stolen."

CHAPTER XII.

THE DENOUEMENT.

Nick Carter spent the rest of that afternoon in completing some arrangements which he had determined upon making for carrying out the ultimate act of this strangely complex and yet remarkably simple tragedy.

He first returned to the studio apartment in Twenty-eighth Street, from which the body of James Dermont had now been removed, and for upwards of an hour he occupied himself in restoring that remarkable steel plate to the place it had been occupied against the top of the window-frame.

In doing this he went through precisely the same operation that he had so successfully practiced to get

coroner and the physician at the time he worked out his theory almost to the point of proving it.

Using the same two screws that Patsy had found attached to the plate, he fastened it to the window-frame in the very holes that had been used before, and which exactly fitted this occasion.

Then, following out the plan he had once outlined, he removed one of the screws and packed the hole thus left full of putty that he had prepared for the purpose. After that he waited quietly for half an hour while the putty should harden somewhat, and then he repeated the performance with a second screw, using great care not to disturb the plate a particle in doing so. He had the satisfaction of seeing it remain in place, apparently with entire firmness, when he had finished the job.

His next act was to descend to the street and to seek the spot where he had made the mark on the pavement, and from whence he now discovered he was in plain view of the steel plate where it was fastened to the window-frame of the studio.

Satisfied as to these points, he turned his steps homeward, and, having dressed himself with unusual care, he hurried to the Garden, and just before the performance for the evening was to begin sent his card to Millie Slade. Upon the back of it he had written:

"Will you see me in regard to Dumont's pet tiger?"

He was presently admitted to her dressing-room, where she greeted him with marked cordiality, although with well studied sadness while she discussed the recent and mysterious death of the tiger-tamer; and she asked:

"What was it in reference to the tiger that has brought you here?"

"I only wanted to ask you what you thought I ought to do with Prince," the detective told her. "Dumont, who was somewhat of a friend of mine, left the tiger to me, and I have already received a considerable offer from Mr. Powers, the manager of this show, to purchase it. Ought I to dispose of it to the circus people; ought I to keep it, or would you like to have it, Miss Slade? You must understand that I personally am not a tiger-tamer."

"But why should I want it?" she asked, putting the very question that Nick hoped she would.

"I understand that the tiger was exceedingly fond of you."

"What!" she laughed, "the tiger hates me. Prince never liked me."

"Oh, indeed," said Nick. "Then I was misinformed. By the way, Miss Slade, I had another object in mind when I called upon you. I was wondering if perhaps you would consent to accompany me, as my lady companion, forenoon you might name, to the studio where Dumont was killed to look over his effects, as a letter left me by him directed me to do. I have discovered a number of letters, documents and keepsakes which are undeniably your property. It occurred to me that you would like to secure possession of them, and that without any publicity. If you will go there with me to-morrow forenoon you can take away with you what things you would like to have of that description."

The woman was plainly nervous by now, but after thinking for a moment in silence and tapping one foot impatiently upon the floor, she finally replied:

"If you will call for me at ten o'clock in the morning at the Victoria, I will go there with you."

"Very good," said Nick.

He thanked her then and took his leave; but once outside the building he chuckled audibly to himself while he remarked in an undertone:

"Unless I greatly mistake the character of Millie Slade, she will visit that studio apartment before she sleeps to-night; but she won't get inside if she does."

For Nick Carter had already taken the tiger back to the studio apartment, and he returned there now himself to pass the remainder of the night with his pet, which he had determined to keep in his possession, at least for a time, and ultimately to make a gift of it to the city zoological department.

At midnight the detective went outside the building and seated himself upon the steps to smoke his cigar, and he had been there but a short time when a carriage drove up to the curb and Millie Slade stepped from it to the pavement. She was hastening forward toward the door when Nick Carter arose and faced her.

"Why, Miss Slade," he said, "this is an unexpected pleasure."

"Yes," she replied, with perfect composure, "I was told that you were spending the night here, and I hoped that you had not yet retired. I thought perhaps we might examine those things to-night."

"I am sorry, Miss Slade," he replied, wondering at her readiness and perfect self-control, "but Prince, the tiger, is up there just now and you have told me that you were not good friends. I will have him away from here when I come for you at the Victoria at ten o'clock in the morning."

She hesitated for a moment as if she would make some further remark, but, controlling the desire, she laughed a little and said:

"Then I will bid you good-night. I will expect you at ten in the morning."

It had been Nick Carter's first idea when he called upon Millie at the Garden, to induce her to visit the apartment that night and to permit her to enter it without hindrance; but he had remembered later that she might and probably would discover the steel plate he had fixed in its place and would therefore be warned against the trap he had laid for her the following day.

It was for that reason he had gone there himself to head her off.

At nine o'clock the following morning the coroner, the coroner's physician, the lieutenant of police, the district attorney and one of his associates, Chick and Patsy all appeared singly or in pairs at the studio apartment and were admitted by the detective.

A block of wood about the size of a man's head was fixed upon the couch in as nearly as possible the position that had been occupied by Dumont's head when he was killed, and over this block of wood the detective had pasted a sheet of white paper.

At a few minutes before ten o'clock Nick Carter sent his card to Millie Slade's room at the Victoria, and a few moments later he was told to "go right up."

She received him in the parlor of her suite and, announcing that she would be ready in a moment, disappeared.

Her case of pistols and rifles, each one ashine from constant polishing, stood in one corner of the room, and, stepping quickly forward the moment he was alone, Nick Carter possessed himself of one of the target pistols and dropped it into his pocket, resuming his chair just as Millie re-entered the room prepared to accompany him.

He had taken time to grasp a couple of cartridges from a box inside the case when he secured the target pistol, and now as they strolled along the street together for the distance they had to traverse was not far, he succeeded in loading the weapon with one hand and while it was inside his coat-pocket.

As they approached together the house where the studio apartment was located Nick purposely piloted the woman so that they must cross the marked spot on the pavement from whence he had no doubt the shot had been fired; and when he arrived at it the detective stopped abruptly and, pointing to the M. S., now cut into the stone by a cold chisel, he remarked, in a jocular tone:

"Those seem to be the initials of your name, Miss Slade."

"Yes," she replied, smiling, "so they do."

Nick Carter raised his head and looked upward toward the open window of the studio.

"Look yonder, Miss Slade," he told her.

She obeyed, and did it with the air of one who was indifferently interested.

"Do you see something shining up there in the window-frame in the upper part of that open window?"

"Yes; I wonder what it is?"

"I wonder, Miss Slade, if you would be willing at this moment to give me an exhibition of your skill?" he asked her.

She gave a little start and laughed uneasily and replied:

"I don't know what you mean, sir."

Without replying he took the target pistol from his pocket, and, raising his right hand, placed the butt of it in her grasp.

For just a moment she trembled visibly, and the flush which had been upon her face disappeared, leaving it deadly pale.

But she recovered her composure instantly, and with a light laugh asked:

"Do you mean that you want me to fire this pistol, which, by the way, looks like one of mine, here in the public street?"

"Yes, Miss Slade."

"Why?"

"I would like to know if you could hit that shining mark up there directly in the center of it."

"Why?"

"I am curious to know what would become of the bullet if you did so."

"Why?"

"I am anxious to know if it would follow the course of another bullet that you fired Sunday afternoon at the same mark."

He seized the wrist of her right hand as he spoke, for otherwise she would have turned the weapon upon him and fired.

"None of that, Miss Slade," he said. "Now, watch me," and he tore the weapon from her grasp. "I am a fairly good shot myself." He raised the weapon. "Watch me, Miss Slade." He fired.

As he did so she staggered and swayed a little bit toward him, but, dropping the pistol back into his pocket, he passed his left arm around her waist and so supported her up the steps of the house which she had mounted with him before she really realized what she was doing.

In another moment they were inside the hall and mounting the steps to the third floor, and presently they entered upon the studio room where the persons already named were waiting in a silent semi-circular group to receive them.

It was the district attorney who stepped forward as they entered, and without a word raised an accusing finger and pointing it toward the paper-covered block of wood at the head of the couch.

There was a hole in the paper now, made by the bullet that Nick Carter had fired from the street.

For a moment Millie Slade gazed upon it like one crazed; then she laughed loudly and shrilly and presently screamed:

"So you have found me out, have you? Yes, I did it, and I am glad you know it!"

* * * * * * *

This completes the story of one of the strangest murder cases with which Nick Carter ever had to do.

Of the subsequent trial and defense of Millie Slade the general public was cognizant recently, so we need have nothing more to say at present.

But a word regarding the two bullets, one fired by Millie Slade into the brain of James Dumont, and the other fired by Nick Carter into the block of wood. They were found to be shaped almost precisely alike when compared together, for the impact of those bullets against the circular groove of the steel plate had grounded them in exactly the same manner on one side.

THE END.

The next number (931) will contain "A Strange Revenge; or, Nick Carter's Dead-line Circus Case."

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SAVED BY AN ELEPHANT.

By MNEMOSYNE.

"Elephants? Yes, I promised to tell you something about them, didn't I?" said Tom Purdy, as Charley Mayfield strolled into the store where the old man was accustomed to regale himself during "off hours."

"And I have come on purpose to hear it," was replied.

"All right. Handle them? I didn't do much else for nearly three years. Ever see Tippoo Saib? Monster, wasn't he? and with the most infernal temper. It took something more'n common to manage him when his mad was up, the brute. Ever kill anybody? You're right he did. Two keepers, a canvasman, and a couple of outsiders. That's his record, just stamped the life out of them, and everybody said I might as well speak for my coffin when I took him in hand, but thank goodness I'm alive and able to take my rations yet. Dead? Years ago. I never heard of any of them being immortal, though I'm told they do live for a century.

"Elephants? Well, they are treacherous pets anyway, and you never know when you are safe. It's all honey or vinegar with them, play or sulks. Clumsy? They do look so, but they can travel like a horse. Just get one chasing you with his trunk raised, his mouth open, his little eyes red coals and trumpeting loud as thunder, and you'll cut. Die standing? That's a fact. I know, for I saw The old fellow had been sick for a long time. got down we had to hoist him up, and one morn- found him bad, got him on his feet, and he stood and weaving and moaning and groaning, until all he trembled and went down in a heap, and that of him."

"Jackson. But what I was thinking of the I promised to tell you about elephants, was one that happened when June, Titus, Anger-

inc & Company were on the road. Remember them? Bully fellows, and a good concern. You never had to wait for your pay. They always had plenty of stamps.

"Good and bad elephants? Of course, the same as people, though you never can trust them any more than a rattlesnake. Take your eye off them, and your jig may be up before you know it.

"We had two elephants. No, they weren't so common in those days, and a baby elephant had never been seen in the country.

"Perform? Not much, except to be led around the ring for children to ride on. But they were a big card, and we had to have them, anyway.

"Well, as I was saying, we had two, a male and female, and I wish you could have seen how jealous the old fellow was when a camel or llama came near his mate.

"Have care of him? No, but I knew all that was going on, just the same."

"And the particular story you had in mind?"

"Well, strange, isn't it, that such big beasts always make friends of the tiniest, littlest ones?"

"There was old Royal George, the biggest lion in America, that had a mouse, and this elephant a dog that wasn't much bigger than a rat, that he fondled and petted and loved better than anything else. Fact, and they were hardly ever separated, and when we came to a bad place in the road he would take the dog up with his trunk and carry him over, as a woman would a baby, and they slept together, and it was fun to see how gingerly he would move his great feet for fear of stepping on his playmate. Queer, wasn't it? Oh, they know more than most people think, and it's only one of the many curious things one sees in the show biz."

"You have been in it a good many years, Tom?"

"All my life, and expect to die in it. But this elephant had another pet—the daughter of a couple of the riders, the prettiest little thing you ever saw; hair like corn-silk, bright and yellow as gold, and eyes like two blue stars. Never saw any stars of that color? I neither, but she had them, just the same. And she was the littlest morsel. Dwarf? Not a bit of it; only little, spry as a fairy and handsome as a picture, and the way they dressed her! Whew! When her father carried her round the ring in his two-horse act she looked just like a rainbow all spangled with stars."

"She must have been very pretty."

"That's no name for it. She was just gorgeous."

"And the elephant loved her, Tom?"

"How could he help it? Everybody did. Wherever we went the women went mad about her and gave her dead loads of presents, and the men were nearly as bad. I remember one old chap who never had any kids, that wanted to take her away, adopt her, send her to school and make her his heiress. Rich? As Astor, and just made a fool of himself about that child."

"But she and the elephant?"

"Oh, she rode and petted him and played with his great ears, and could do anything with him. It was a pretty sight to see the little thing standing on his head, with her curls flying and her eyes dancing, and he stepping so carefully for fear of throwing her off. When he was mad? She went right up to him and put her little, soft, white hand on his trunk and said, 'Romeo, why will you be so naughty? You ought to behave yourself,' and he cooled right down. Afraid of him? Not a bit, not half as much as any of the rest, and often when she got tired of riding in the carriage she used to crawl out and get lifted up on his back, and I've known her to go to sleep there with the little dog in her arms."

"It was strange, as you say, that a mere child should thus obtain control of so great and passionate an animal."

"Well, I don't know," answered Purdy reflectively. "Beasts have about the same nature as we have, and

there's something in the big book about a little child leading us all. Anyhow, she did lead that elephant and make him do just as she pleased. But for that matter so she could me. Ever save her life? Yes, once when she was watching him swim, and tumbled over a bridge into deep water, and once—but I am coming to that. Swim? Like a duck—the elephant I mean. You'd have thought so if you had seen him go for that child when he heard her scream, and lift her above his head and paddle for the shore. You couldn't have done it quicker or more tenderly, and when he laid her on the grass, I verily believe he cried like the rest of us for fear some harm had come to her. Anyhow, his eyes filled with tears. Might have been from the water? I don't believe it. Elephants have feelings. Crocodile-tears? That's all gammon, without some brute of an old bull should cry after having swallowed a nigger baby, because there wasn't more of it. I'll tell you about one I saw——"

"An elephant, Tom?"

"No; a crocodile that——"

"Not now. Stick to the elephants."

"Yes, p'raps 'tis best. Well, this child, her name was Inez. Spanish, isn't it? Got it in Mexico, where her parents were traveling, when she was born. Pretty, anyhow. Well, she just had the run of the concern. Used to pet the ponies and the dogs, and none of them were ever cross to her. Other animals? Of course we did. A dozen cages of lions and tigers, and leopards and wolves. Hyena? Did you ever see a show without one of them? People think they are always digging up graves and feasting on dead bodies, and that makes them an attraction.

"Play with them? Not much, she didn't. They are cantankerous beasts, and friends with nobody. Yes, there was a bear or two, a panther and a cage of monkeys. The children always go for them, you know, to have fun, and I verily believe they are almost half human."

"You must endorse the Darwinian theory?"

"Don't know nothing about that. What? We are descendants from apes? One of them my great-grandfather? The man must be a fool."

"But I am waiting to hear about the little girl and the elephant, Tom."

"So you are. When I get to talking about old times so many things come up that I can't keep my mind steady to one.

"Yes, about Inez and the elephant. Well, we had been knocking around the country all the season, and the cages had become shaky, the horses about used up—no, there was no such thing as traveling by rail in those days—and the animals looking seedy.

"Feed them high? Certainly, but they showed travel, and the weather was hot—the white bear panting and ready to pawn his skin for a cake of ice, and the rest of them cross, snappish and surly."

"A bad state of affairs, Tom."

"Yes, but showmen get used to such things—grin and bear them somehow, and learn to make the best of things as they come.

"Sound philosophy? Don't understand that. Much as I can do to comprehend my own language."

His companion smiled, in one sense of the term, as Tom Purdy did in another, and continued:

"There got at last to be an uneasy feeling. Most of us expected every day that some of the animals would break out and go tearing around, like as not kill somebody, or else escape and there would be a high time hunting them up.

"Any do so? Yes, down came the panther's cage one night as we were napping along—traveling asleep you know—and away went that beast.

"What became of him? Never know, any more than some of the fortunes we make because of their sheep; last we heard from. Where's he for passing dominion, you bet.

"Spotted? We read as in the papers.

"The others? Yes, it did make us feel rather shaky, but we patched up things as well as we could and kept on, trusting to luck to bring us through until we should strike some town where it would pay to lay up for repairs."

"A dangerous experiment, Tom."

"So it turned out; and that brings me to the story you want to hear."

"We stopped at a little town way out in Missouri, and stayed over Sunday.

"No, we never fed that day. Better for their health, some said, some that they didn't kick up such a row as when eating, and yes, it may have been out of regard for the day, though I never quite understood how it was worse than traveling, as we generally did.

"Anyhow, we stopped over Sunday. I remember it just as well as if it were yesterday.

"It was in what is called Indian summer, and the air was warm and smoky, and the flowers blooming, and the bees humming, and the trees all spotted over with red and yellow, like a clown's dress, and the birds were chirping, and it seemed as if the world was getting ready to take a nap after putting on its best clothes.

"Go to church? I didn't, but some of the rest did.

"Inez? No; she stayed with me in the afternoon, while her father and mother went, and we kinder naturally walked over to the canvas to see that everything was right, and she got to playing round in the ring, while I turned in atop of the bear's cage, for forty winks.

"I wish you could have seen that child then! She was dressed all in white, with a blue ribbon round her waist, her hair looking as if it had been spun out of gold, and the cunningest slippers ever made."

"And you left her to wander alone, Tom?"

"Oh! I was there, but she always did, and never got into any more mischief than an angel.

"Well, I don't know how long I dozed before I heard the most trendendous roar and crash, and my hair all stood up on end as I saw that the big Bengal tiger had burst through the bars of his cage and sprung out into the ring, and was creeping along, licking his great jaws, with his tail curling and his eyes just blazing, as you may have seen a cat, toward an unsuspecting mouse."

"And the child, Tom; the child?"

"Poor little thing! She was seated with her back to the center pole and her pretty head resting against it, fast asleep, and thinking as little of danger as a white dove when a great blacksnake is crawling noiselessly up to its nest.

"I tell you it was horrible! I'd heard tell of blood turning into ice, but never knew what it was until then."

The old man paused, drew the cuff of his coat over his eyes, as if to remove suspicious moisture, and resumed:

"I don't know how long I sat looking at them. I couldn't have moved to save my life—seemed turned into stone."

"And all the while the tiger was drawing nearer to the poor child?"

"Yes; creeping along on its belly and showing its great teeth, and working its claws in and out of their sheath and purring."

"Getting ready for the fatal spring?"

"Yes; that's the nature of the beast."

"And you sat still and saw the horrible, mangling death?"

"I tell you I couldn't have moved if I had been offered the world. It wasn't very long, of course, but it seemed like a thousand years."

"Hair turned gray in a single night? I believe it, and I wonder mine didn't. My heart seemed a great stone, there was a big lump in my throat and the blood just ran cold in my veins.

"I tried to shout and scare the beast, but couldn't open my lips. Glued together? That's about it."

"And the tiger sprang upon her and killed her? It is too horrible even to think of."

"It crept on, on, then it crouched still lower, then, with a

wild roar, it sprang. Heavens! I wouldn't endure the agony of that minute again to be president.

"Kill her? No, it struck its head against the center pole and rolled over, only tearing her dress with its long, sharp claws, and just drawing blood.

"The girl awoke suddenly, saw the tiger and began to scream, but didn't seem all have power to move, and in another instant would have been torn to pieces. But just then the elephant appeared to understand what was going on, snapped its chains as if they had been thread, and came rushing into the ring, lifted the child with its trunk, trumpeted and went for the tiger, tooth and nail, bored it with its tusks and trampled it, with the blood flying from both, for the tiger's teeth and nails were not idle.

"What was I doing? I got down off the cage, but saw I couldn't be of any use, and didn't interfere until the tiger caved and tried to sneak away. Then I went to the elephant and got the girl and carried her out and called for help.

"Kill the tiger? It might about as well, for it never was any good afterward. But we had a terrible time coaxing the elephant away, for when we got back it was crushing the tiger under its knees."

"And the child? Was she hurt?"

"None to speak of."

"Living? Yes. Ever see the celebrated Madam la France—that great, strong, tall woman?

"Yes, to be sure; we all grow. Well, that's her.

"Go into cages? Of course she does, and makes the animals stand round.

"Afraid of them? Not a bit of it, any more than when a child.

"Going? Well, good day."

PERSIA'S RAGGED ARMY.

The disturbances which are still rife in Persia are not likely to be allayed unless something is done to improve the condition of the Shah's troops. The Persian army, in fact, is one of the most wretched-looking in the world.

The majority of the men dress in anything, having no particular uniform; while their rifles are either antiquated or useless. When on the march they take as baggage waterjars, bedding, pots, and pans, which are carried on donkeys, two or three men clubbing together to buy an animal and to pay for its upkeep.

The soldier jogs along barefoot, or in a pair of cotton shoes, and it is nothing unusual for various battalions to get mixed up, discipline being a more or less unknown quantity.

RIVER TRAFFIC IN MEXICO.

It would be a difficult matter to estimate the number of people who are directly dependent upon the mercantile supplies of Tampico, a port in Mexico, but it is certain that the number can be written with six figures. More than 5,000 boats are in commission on the Tamesi and Panucco rivers: they vary in length from 20 to 60 feet, and carry the wild and cultivated products of the interior to Tampico, where they discharge their cargoes and reload with merchandise and other supplies.

With two great waterways, the Tamesi and the Panuco, the native navigators find their business profitable, despite the fact that it requires about thirty days to make a round trip to distant points on the river. Every conceivable form of tropical plant and fruit may be found in their cargoes, as well as native-made earthenware and other manufactured articles. A long pole is the only compass required by the captain of one of these barks, but he wields the bamboo which pilots him safely over the shoal-filled waters of a tropical waterway. Many of the plantations along the rivers keep several of these boats in commission all the time, carrying their smaller products to the market and bringing back supplies for the hacienda.

In the early hours of the morning green bananas are piled up along the wharves like cord-wood, baskets of cocoanuts, pineapples, wild and cultivated lemons and oranges and innumerable other products of the tropics can be seen in enormous quantities. And it is surprising how quickly the supply of the day is exhausted. A string of freight-cars on the track opposite the market are waiting for a portion of most every cargo, and by noon there is little left but the small fruits and vegetables in moderate quantities.

JAPAN GETS A NEW ISLAND.

The Japanese report the discovery of a previously unknown island about two hundred and eighty miles east of Formosa. The discovery is somewhat surprising at this late date. The Japanese flag has been raised over it, and the name Nichigawa has been given to the island.

A Japanese agent, Mr. Nichihata, is very enthusiastic over the discovery. He says it has great natural wealth.

He found in the waters between the surrounding flat reef and the shores of the island several kinds of marketable shells and mother-of-pearl in abundance. There are also inexhaustible supplies of commercial coral; and, better still, he found enormous quantities of calcium phosphate on the reefs that will afford the best of artificial fertilizer, and he thinks the supply is sufficient to keep miners busy for fifty or sixty years.

As his vessel approached the island Mr. Nichihata saw a cloud of birds hovering over it, and he found later that they were of a species which the Japanese call osadori. These birds abound there in great numbers, and are counted among the valuable resources of the island, as there is a good market for their plumage in Europe, particularly in France. Trade in these feathers has already begun, and they are the first of the island's resources to be shipped to Europe.

The flora is tropical, but the island seems to be fairly healthful. No reptiles or venomous insects can be found, and the only quadruped that the island seems to possess is a variety of rat about the size of a rabbit. This addition of a few score of square miles to the known land surface of the earth bids fair to add a little to the world's wealth.

EVEN AUTHORS MAKE SLIPS.

Even experienced writers, it may astonish you to learn, sometimes make their characters do astounding things.

Robinson Crusoe also performed a most wonderful feat. When he decided to abandon the wreck and try to swim ashore he took the precaution to remove all his clothes, and yet, by some strange magic, of which the secret has been lost, the author makes him, when in this condition of Nature, fill his pockets with biscuits.

The great Shakespeare had a trick of introducing the most glaring anachronisms. For instance, he makes a clock strike in ancient Rome, at a time more than a thousand years before clocks were invented, when such an event would certainly have been the eighth wonder of the world.

Thackeray was no mean rival to Shakespeare in vagaries of this kind, but in his case they appear to have been the result of pure carelessness and forgetfulness. The most flagrant case, perhaps, is where, after burying Lady Kew, and effectively dismissing her from the story, he brings her to life again, to help him out with his plot; and in other cases his capacity for mixing up the names of his characters is confusing, considering the number he introduces.

Emile Zola, in spite of his carefulness, makes the astonishing statement in one of his novels that the deaf and dumb recovered their hearing and sight, an event which savors very much of the miraculous.

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